

Men-at-Arms

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British Cavalry Equipments 1800–1941



Mike Chappell

REVISED EDITION



MIKE CHAPPELL comes from an Aldershot family with British Army connections stretching back several generations. He enlisted as a teenage private in the Royal Hampshire Regiment in 1952 and retired in 1974, as RSM of the 1st Battalion The Wessex Regiment (Rifle Volunteers), after seeing service in Malaya, Cyprus, Swaziland, Libya, Germany, Ulster and home garrisons. He began painting military subjects in 1968 and since then has gained world-wide popularity as a military illustrator. Mike has also written and illustrated many books for Osprey.

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Author's Note

The original edition of *British Cavalry Equipments 1800–1941* was published almost twenty years ago. This revised edition incorporates new illustrations, additional information, and the correction of errors in the original. The author wishes to thank the series editor for the opportunity to revise this title; and to acknowledge the contribution made by the many readers of the first edition who, over the years, have got in touch with information – and some criticism.

BRITISH CAVALRY EQUIPMENTS 1800-1941

INTRODUCTION

CAVALRY EQUIPMENT, as far as the scope of this book is concerned, may be defined as follows:

1. Everything that was put on a troop horse of line cavalry.
2. The accoutrements worn by its rider.
3. Weapons special to the mounted soldier.

In the pages that follow uniforms, ceremonial trappings and officers' equipment may be illustrated or referred to, but only when supplementary to the main theme, which is the equipment of the Other Ranks of British line cavalry regiments as worn on active service from the start of the 19th century to the dismounting of the last cavalry units in 1941. The equipment of the Household Cavalry, Yeomanry and Mounted Infantry units is a separate study not covered in this work.

A glossary is included at the end of the text as is a chronology of the phasing in and out of service of saddlery, weapons and equipment.

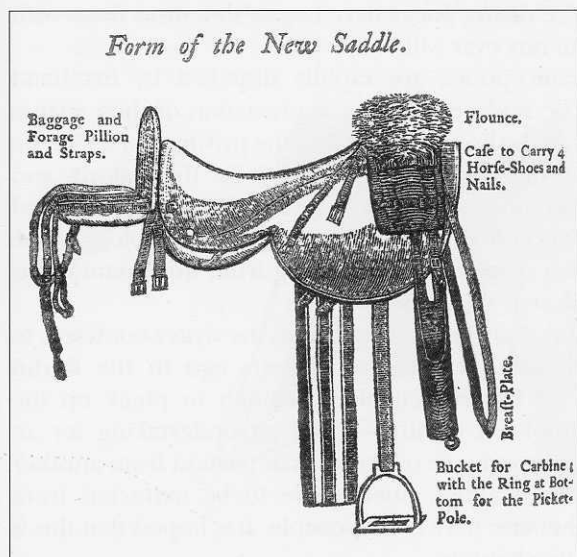
In 1778 Capt. Hinde published his *Discipline of the Light-Horse*, in which he recommended a new pattern of saddle invented by Sir William Erskine and 'approved of' by the king. Designed for both Heavy and Light Cavalry, it had a holster on the near side, and the pillion was braced with an 'iron bow'. Hinde illustrated Erskine's invention with this woodcut. (Author's collection)

Horses

The horse is no longer part of everyday life. It can be seen daily on our television screens, but only those of us connected with the sports and leisure pursuits that involve horses will ever experience the animals at first hand. Working horses are nowadays rare enough to attract considerable interest, while knowledge of the management of horses in draught is fast becoming the privilege of the well-to-do instead of the stock-in-trade of the coachman and the carter.

Yet it was only a short time ago that horses still had a part to play in commercial life. As recently as the 1930s and '40s horses towed barges on our canals, pulled freight wagons for the railways, hauled deliveries of milk and coal to our doors, and were indispensable to both the farmer and the brewer. In those days contact with horses and knowledge of their management was common. Most families had some member who 'knew' horses and was familiar with the language of the tack room, farrier and vet.

The disappearance of the working horse was abrupt. After a close association with man going back thousands of years, the horse has been supplanted by the internal combustion engine in the lifespan of one generation. Abrupt too has been the loss of knowledge of horses – not only the terminology associated with them, but also the



Watercolour by Atkinson of the 1st (King's) Dragoon Guards, c.1812. The newly introduced helmet and girdle are shown, but the coat conforms to no known regulations. The saddle appears to be of a pattern similar to that shown in the previous illustration, still in use 16 years after the introduction of the 1796 Heavy Cavalry saddle. (Anne S.K.Brown Military Collection)



appreciation of their nature. Generations accustomed to seeing horses only on the screen or the racing pages have begun to endow them with qualities they never had, nor ever will.

Of course, all misconceptions are rapidly dispelled by first-hand contact with horses, to be replaced with an appreciation of their virtues and vices. Nevertheless, as the horse is nowadays the privilege of a few, the majority must remain content to be spectators. It is for the majority and not the experts, therefore, that this book is set out. Nothing is assumed except that the reader has little or no knowledge of the physiology of the horse or the construction of saddlery. By starting from this premise it is hoped to keep a complicated subject simple.

Although by no means a proficient horseman, the writer confesses to a passing interest in horses. Starting many years ago in the Berlin Garrison Saddle Club he has ridden often enough to pluck up the courage to write this book on cavalry – quite an undertaking for an infantryman! This slight experience of horses is important from another point of view, for it has enabled much more to be extracted from research than might otherwise have been possible. It is hoped that this is apparent in the following chapters.

The End of the Horse in Military Service

Mention has already been made of the role of the horse in the 1930s. At that time the British Army, like the armies of some other nations, was making the painful transition from animal transport (AT) to mechanical transport (MT). The procedure was then known as 'Mechanisation'. In the ten years immediately prior to the Second World War the British Army underwent the change from a service almost totally dependent on the horse for battlefield mobility to one totally committed to mechanical transport. Thus the accumulated skills and knowledge of hundreds of years of military horse management were made redundant as the Army moved into the machine age.

Gunners, sappers and infantrymen, supply, ordnance, signals and staff, all gave up the horses which were to most only a means of transport. But for one branch of the Army the passing of the horse threatened their very existence: for without horses where was the justification for retaining regiments of Hussars, Lancers or Dragoon Guards?

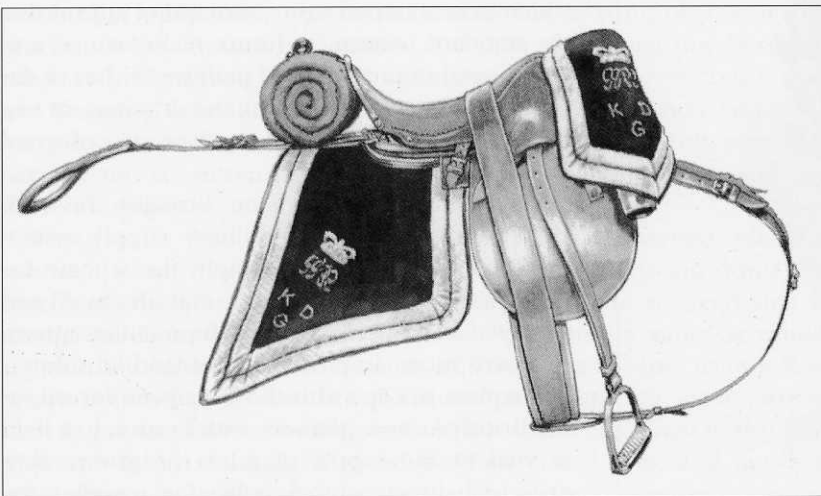
To the very last the cavalry, despite the lessons of the recent war, believed that the horse was more than just an aid to mobility. It was also, they considered, a platform from which to fight, and they argued with passion the need for its retention in the service. For this reason, ludicrous though it now seems, swords and lances survived a war that saw the introduction of machine gun battalions, poison gas and the tank; and the charge, with all its associated romantic images of glory, was still considered, 30 or more years into the 20th century, a viable operation of war.

The half-understood myths which gathered around the annihilation of the Polish cavalry in 1939 would finally have the beneficial effect of dramatising the passing of mounted men from the modern battlefield; but this was all in the future. In Britain the end of the soldier on horseback came soon enough to ensure that no British cavalry regiment would ever suffer the fate of the unfortunate Poles. Despite a powerful pro-cavalry lobby the order was given to dismount all the Regular cavalry except for a few regiments stationed abroad. There remained only the problem of the employment of the horseless cavalry.

With their rejection of the role of dragoon the British cavalry had long

ceased to regard themselves as infantry who rode into battle. Centuries of looking down, literally and metaphorically, at the soldier on foot, coupled with their leaders' attitude to the horse as a mark of social status, had left cavalrymen with a strong aversion to dismounted action. The act of swapping their horses for trucks would simply convert them to lorried infantry – an unthinkable development. It was, therefore, to the armoured fighting

Heavy Cavalry review order saddlery, 1812. The saddle is the 1796 Heavy Cavalry pattern of the 1st (King's) Dragoon Guards. Housings and holster caps are dark blue with yellow lace and red and yellow badging and 'train'. The rolled cloak is strapped behind the cantle and a leather surcingle encircles the complete saddle and girth. Note the crupper and breastplate.



A Heavy Cavalry bridle, 1815. In the period 1800 to 1860 the heavy cavalry followed the trend set by the light cavalry regarding bridles until the adoption of a universal pattern. Thus, the example illustrated is very much of the late 18th century when web or leather halters and curb and T-bar snaffle bits of the types shown were in use. The 'heavies' gradually adopted the 1812 pattern bridle of the light cavalry in the years after Waterloo.



vehicle (a branch of the service with which they had had no previous connections) that the cavalry turned for a role to justify their continued existence.

Thus, although a small mounted force was maintained in Palestine until 1941, the cavalry regiments of the British Army handed in their horses and merged with the Royal Tanks to form the Royal Armoured Corps. The age of the British soldier on horseback in any but a ceremonial role was at an end. In the war which was about to break out the now-mechanised cavalry regiments of the British Army would once more find glory in full measure, but under very different circumstances.

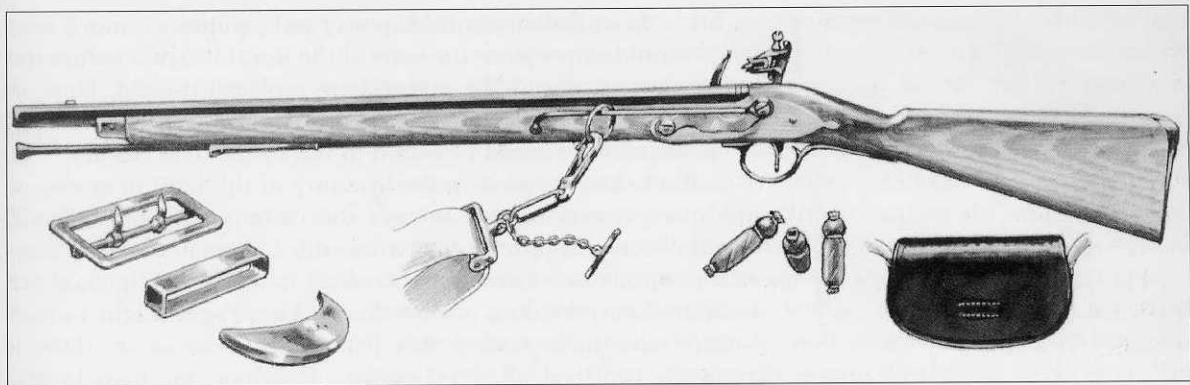
As the horses went back to the remount depots for disposal so did the special equipment needed by the cavalry. Saddlery, cavalry weapons, items of clothing and personal equipment peculiar to the mounted soldier, all were returned to Ordnance to be stored and eventually disposed of. In the 60 to 70 years that have elapsed since then expert knowledge of cavalry equipment has dwindled, as the old soldiers who knew it have faded away. To trace the story of this fascinating aspect of British military history we must leap back 140 years in time, from the demise of the military horse to the dawning of the 19th century.

1800-15

(Plates A, B and C)

In choosing a point in time from which to start a study of British cavalry equipment, the opening years of the 19th century recommend themselves. For although there is hardly a wealth of information available from this period, that surviving from the 18th century is scant indeed. The early 1800s also saw the first moves towards standardisation, and the beginning of the demise of the system which allowed the colonels of regiments so much say in the equipping of their troops. Horse Guards – the Ministry of Defence of its day – began to issue specifications of equipment, examples of which were stamped with a wax seal of approval as the standard pattern for future manufacture; and the survival of these 'sealed patterns' either in the form of written specifications and drawings, or – in rare cases – the items themselves, are of great value to the historian.

The wars with Napoleon brought the deficiencies of the British military supply system sharply into focus. Quite simply, the scheme for the financing, contracting, manufacture and supply of all types of military equipment was prone to corruption, impossibly slow and absolutely inadequate to cope with the expansion forced on the British Army by the wars with France. In a field as vital as the supply of arms the government exercised direct control, collecting together the



work sub-contracted to the makers of parts and assembling them to make finished weapons in the armouries from which they were subsequently issued. Despite this degree of centralisation the system, geared to back-street manufacture, barely worked. However, if the supply of arms was bad the supply of other equipment was worse. The complicated system of purchase and cash allowances then current meant that the colonel of a regiment ran his outfit rather like a business, buying equipment when obliged to by putting the contract for its supply out to tender. He then arranged terms with the manufacturer to suit himself financially, while indulging his personal preferences to a considerable degree. In practical terms this meant that no two regiments would be equipped in a similar manner, and that the regiment of a parsimonious colonel would be equipped with cheap and shoddy gear. Conversely, a colonel with money to burn would lavish it on his men, dressing them as dandies and equipping them with the finest that money could buy. Some colonels even went so far as to scorn the weapons issued from Government armouries, and armed their regiments instead with weapons bought from fashionable gunmakers. This sometimes corrupt and always inefficient system was tolerated because it had been the accepted practice for a long time. Events elsewhere were to force a change.

Across the channel Napoleon had set up factories for the production of the material needed to clothe, arm and equip his huge armies. His example could not be ignored. The British authorities needed to standardise equipment, approve its manufacture by firms big enough to produce it quickly and in quantity, and then direct that purchases be made only from their approved contractors. The range of choice that had formerly been the prerogative of cavalry colonels now began to narrow as Horse Guards began to introduce swords, firearms, saddlery, harness and accoutrements to standard patterns for the Light and the Heavy Dragoons.

First in the field, as far as light cavalry was concerned, was the sword or sabre. The Royal Warrant of November 1796 laid down the specifications for the new light cavalry weapon, and decreed that it should be 3ins. shorter than the 1788 light cavalry sabre it would replace, but have the same amount of 'bend', i.e. 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ ins. from a line drawn between point and hilt. Thus the new sabre was more curved than its predecessor; a slashing weapon, it inspires argument to this day, with one lobby claiming it to be the best sword ever, and another pointing out its limitations.

The Dragoon Carbine, 1796 pattern. The carbine is shown from the left-hand side. Note the method of attachment of the pouch belt. Also shown are the pouch belt buckle, slide and tip. At right is the pouch and three of the 30 cartridges it contained.



Heavy Cavalry trooper's sword belt, 1815. Note the rectangular plate buckle and the horizontal strap and stud between the belt rings. This was to secure the sword when on foot, when the sabretache would also be hitched up.

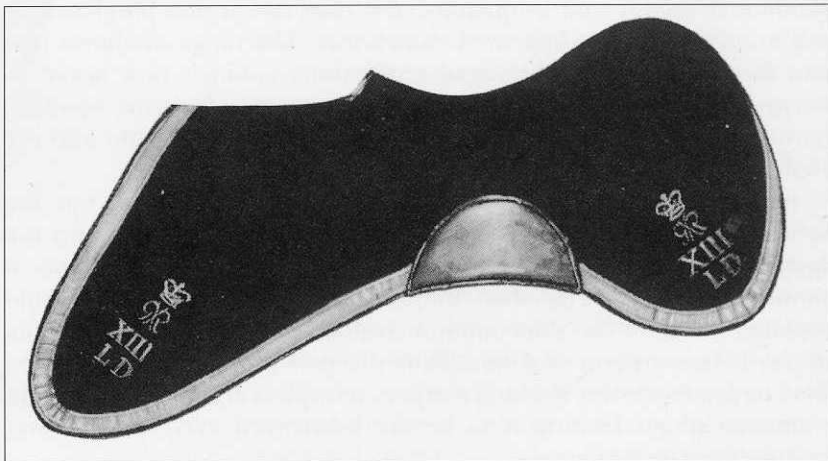
As with all items of weaponry and equipment, much time would elapse from the issue of the Royal Warrant before the new sabre could be said to have replaced the old. Thus, in the early years of the 19th century both the 1788 and 1796 pattern sabres could be found in use by the light cavalry.

The other weapons in the armoury of the light dragoon, or the newly converted hussar, were the carbine and pistol. Pistols could be any of a variety of patterns, with a move in the early years of the century to convert them to swivel ramrods, which could not be lost when reloading on horseback. The 'Paget' Light Cavalry carbine also incorporated this feature. Introduced in 1800, it gradually replaced all other forms of carbine for light cavalry (except when colonels furnished their men with alternative arms). The 'Paget' carbine served on well into the middle of the 19th century, even surviving the conversion from flint to percussion lock.

To carry this sabre and carbine the light cavalry trooper had sword and pouch belts. The swordbelt was constructed from thin strips of whitened buff leather with a brass 'snake-clasp' buckle and furniture. Two sets of slings hung from the belt to support the sabre and the sabretache, which – for troopers – was of plain black leather for active service. More elaborate patterns, bearing regimental devices, etc., were sported by officers and by the troopers of some regiments with rich colonels. The pouch belt, also made of buff leather, had two purposes. It supported a pouch containing ammunition for the pistols and carbine, and it also acted as a sling for the carbine, enabling it to be fired from horseback. A slide and swivel clipped to a ring and bar on the carbine and allowed it to be suspended from the pouch belt. Thus, even if the carbine were dropped or temporarily put aside after firing while the sword was drawn, it remained hanging muzzle down below the rider's right thigh.

A trooper's personal field equipment was completed with a haversack and a canteen. These items were common to all types of troops, and were worn by cavalry on shortened straps to prevent them

bouncing about at the trot or a faster pace.



Shabraque of the 13th Light Dragoons, 1812. Dark blue cloth edged with yellow lace, with gold, silver and red embroidery. This trooper's shabraque went over the saddle and was itself partially covered by a white sheepskin.

Moving from the man to his mount: a special universal saddle for light cavalry was approved in 1805 – the ‘Light Cavalry Universal Saddle, Pattern 1805’, also known as the ‘Hungarian’ or the ‘Hussar’ saddle. As in the case of the sabre and certain uniforms, head-dress and equipment, fashion played a great part in their choice; the style set originally by Hungarian light horse in Austrian service, and copied by French light cavalry, was much in vogue. (Many British light cavalry regiments began to style themselves as ‘Hussars’ from 1806 onwards.) The Hungarian saddle was of a complicated construction, and was difficult to set up on a horse or to adjust once in place. Unlike a modern saddle it had no padding beneath the sideboards, and needed many thicknesses of blanket (at times 16!) to prevent the mount developing a sore back. The ‘Hussar’ fashion of shabraque and sheepskin with their retaining surcingle and straps added to the complications of saddling up. However, the shabraque was usually dispensed with on active service. The saddle was kept in position on the horse by means of a girth, a ‘breastplate’ and crupper straps. On the front arch were carried holstered pistols, the rolled cloak and a ‘boot’, or leather tube, for the muzzle of the carbine. (This weapon was usually strapped in a near-vertical position when not required, by attaching it also to the front arch.)

On the pillion of the saddle was a tubular valise, while any of the following could also be attached – usually on the offside – to the rear of the saddle: nosebag, cornsack, forage net, reaping hook and spade. A light cavalryman of the period rode ‘twenty stone’ (280 lbs) in his Hungarian saddle, and needed to sit it correctly if he were not to give



Light Cavalry, 1812. This C. Hamilton Smith print shows well the equipment of the light cavalryman of the early 19th century. Note particularly the 1812 pattern bridle, the ‘Paget’ carbine strapped to the saddle with its lock wrapped in cloth, and the pouch/carbine belt. (Parks of Canada)

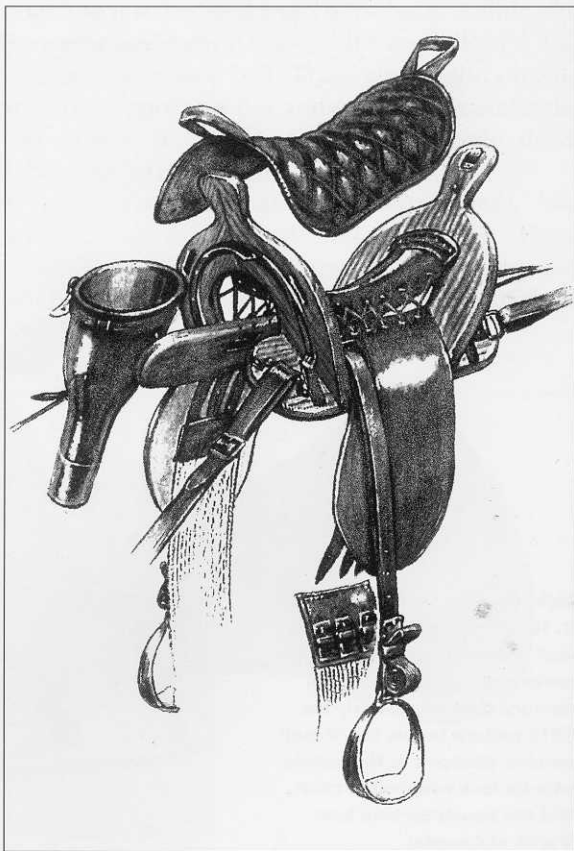
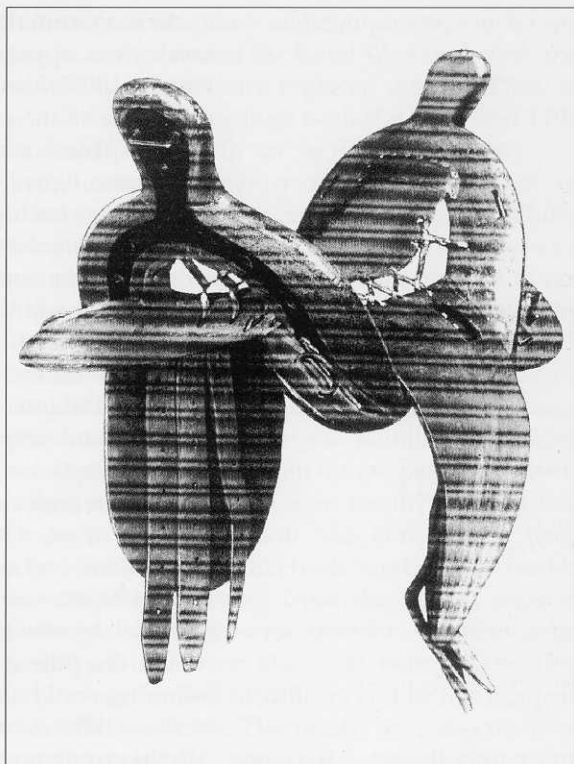
his horse a sore back. Records of the time recommended a long stirrup and an upright posture, as anything else would result in the horse having to be led.

In 1812 a special bridle was adopted for the light cavalry, who had formerly used, as in the case of saddles, a regimental pattern. The new light cavalry bridle, like the new saddle, had a strong Hungarian 'flavour' about it, while retaining the curb and snaffle of the previous bridle. Elaborate face-pieces and rosettes were incorporated into the leather-work of the new bridle.

All the equipment discussed so far has been that of the troopers or other ranks. Broadly speaking, officers' equipment followed the same pattern as that of their men but was of better quality and manufacture – and much more ornate! At this time, and for many years to come, officers purchased their own clothing, equipment, weapons and mounts. While elaborate instructions governed what an officer might or might not wear in barracks, or on ceremonial occasions, more discretion was allowed in the field. There is ample evidence that this discretion was taken advantage of to the full during the period in question.

1800 to 1815 saw the light cavalry undergoing many changes as regards uniforms, titles, weapons and equipment. The adulation of the Hungarian hussar, then current throughout Europe, is difficult to comprehend today. These horsemen were first hired as mercenaries and then, when the supply of genuine Hungarians ran out, replaced by native regiments dressed, armed and mounted in stylised imitation of the original. The hussars set a military fashion which even the conservative British – who had no connection with Hungary whatsoever – slavishly copied. The 'reaping-hook' broadsword, cossack-style saddle and, eventually, the outlandish costume of the hussar was wished on a substantial part of the British light cavalry with little evaluation as to their suitability.

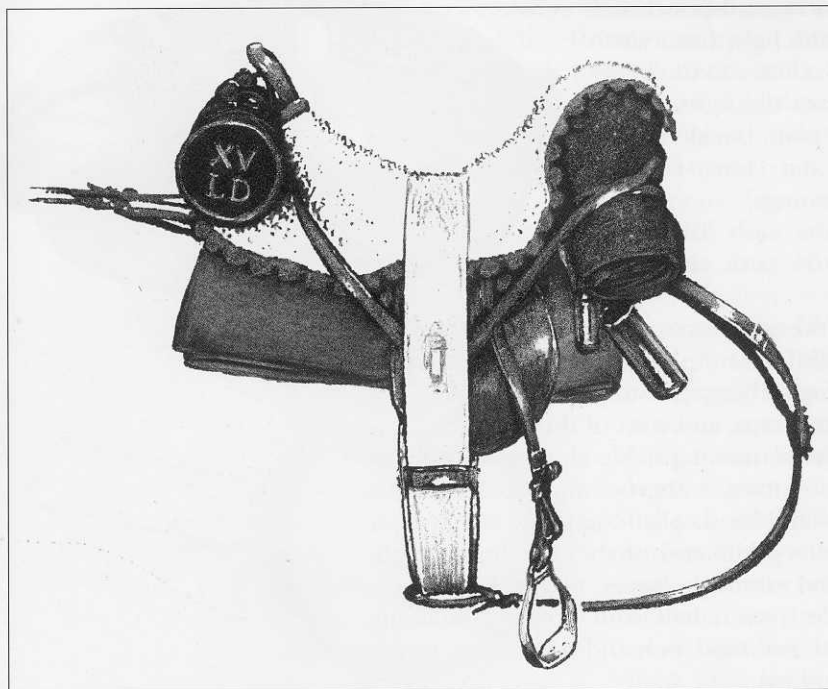
By contrast, British heavy cavalry managed to retain their traditional red-coated appearance although they too were not above copying the best in European equipment. It was from Germany that they took the idea for a new saddle in the 1790s. This, the first universal pattern saddle for British heavy cavalry, was 'sealed' by the Board of Ordnance in 1796, the design being based on a modification of a Prussian cuirassier saddle



LEFT The 1805 pattern Light Cavalry Universal Saddle (rear view) had a beechwood saddle-tree with arches reinforced with iron. Between them, the seat and flaps were attached with nails and rawhide thongs, and three straps were nailed to each sideboard to secure the webbing girth. Stirrups and their leathers were attached through slots in the sideboards.

LEFT, BELOW Once it was on the horse's back – over a folded blanket – a quilted pilch, holsters, breastplate and crupper were attached (front view).

BELOW Next a valise, rolled cloak, sheepskin, carbine boot and surcingle were added, the whole assembly being secured with Y-shaped straps passing forward and to the rear from the surcingle. (Author's drawings)



brought to England by the Duke of York. With the acceptance of the 'Heavy Cavalry Universal Saddle, pattern 1796' the personal preference that had been the prerogative of colonels ceased, and from this point all new saddles purchased from contractors had to conform to the design of the sealed pattern. Thus, by the end of the period under study, most regiments would have re-equipped with the 1796 saddle. Even so, saddlery had a long life and the parsimony of a careful colonel could make it longer, with worn and broken items being carefully repaired by the saddler. It is likely, therefore, that some regimental-pattern saddles of the pre-1796 era may still have been in use in 1815. (See MAA 126: *Wellington's Light Cavalry*, and MAA 130: *Wellington's Heavy Cavalry*.)

The 1796 pattern saddle was built over a conventional wooden tree comprising sideboards with front and rear arches. The front arch had two points which continued down below the sideboards to give lateral stability. These points terminated in slots to which the breastplate straps were fastened. Officers' pattern saddles had sideboards with 'fans' which projected to the rear of the saddle to form a platform for the valise, etc., but this feature was not incorporated in the saddles of the troopers. The pillion kit of the men, therefore, rode squarely on their horses' backs. All saddles of this pattern had a brass beading guard on the cantle to prevent wear, and this formed the main distinguishing feature of the type. Numerous 'Ds' and loops were incorporated for the attachment of equipment, which usually comprised a tubular valise behind the cantle and a pair of holsters on the front arch. Strapped above the holsters was the rolled cloak.

A leather guard or flounce to prevent chafing from the reins encircled the cloak above the peak of the front arch, and the carbine boot was attached to the front offside. Other items visible on the saddle, in full marching order, might be the messtin (sometimes called the

canteen), cornsacks, forage nets, a variety of tools and the water-deck (this last item was a piece of canvas, four feet by four feet, painted in the regimental colours. Its purpose was to cover the saddle when off the horse's back. It was usually folded and wrapped around the valise when not in use.) A folded blanket went between the saddle and the horse, and a girth, surcingle, breastplate and crupper kept the saddle in place. Decorative ' housings' and holster covers were worn by the heavy cavalry in review order, but rarely in the field.

The heavy cavalry bridle of the period featured a

double bit, curb and snaffle. The curb bit with its curved side-bars had a brass boss usually ornamented with regimental devices. The snaffle or 'bridoon' bit was sometimes fitted by means of a quick-release T-bar, which shows up in contemporary paintings as a steel rod running through one of the cheek pieces. Halters or head collars could be of webbing or leather, with the strap passed to the nearside of the saddle or bound around the halter neck-strap.

As with the light cavalry, officers' saddles and bridles followed the same pattern as the troopers' but were generally of better quality and could be much more ornate. Many regiments went in for special 'full-dress' bridles, breastplates, cruppers, stirrups and leathers for their officers and sometimes for the men. It is sufficient to say that these items were not used in the field, but were kept only for the great occasions when cavalry showed off in all their splendour.

The arms of the heavy cavalryman included sword and pistol for all, and carbines for the troopers. The sword was the straight-bladed, hatchet-tipped 1796 pattern. With a 35in. blade it was heavy and difficult to handle, but records of the execution wrought with it give an indication of how skilful in its use troopers became through drill and training. The cutting force that could be exerted from the back of a horse was considerable, as was the sword's reach and pointing ability.

The carbine and pistol on issue to the heavy cavalryman at this time originated – like the sword – from the year 1796 and were both of musket calibre (.75in.). Called the 'Dragoon Carbine pattern 1796', the carbine was three and a half feet in length and weighted eight pounds. The 1796 pattern Dragoon pistol underwent modification in 1801 when a steel ramrod was fitted below the barrel.

On his person the heavy cavalry trooper wore canteen, haversack, sword, belt, sabretache and pouch belt. The first two items were universal to all arms and were issued by the Board of Ordnance as campaign stores. The sabretache and pouch belt were similar items to those worn by the light cavalryman; but the sword belt was an item exclusive to the heavy cavalry, being much broader than the light cavalry pattern and with a rectangular plate buckle for all regiments except Life Guards and Horse Guards, who had ornate snake-clasp fastenings.

The British cavalryman of the early 19th century could expect to ride to battle with the following equipment:

Full 'regimentals' – i.e. full dress uniform, except that overalls replaced breeches; cloak; saddle, complete with girth, stirrups, breastplate and crupper; surcingle; baggage straps (set of three for securing the valise); holsters with straps, and a set of three cloak straps; shoe case; carbine bucket; a valise containing stable clothes, forage cap, toilet gear, spare shirt and underclothes, and grooming articles for the horse; messtin or canteen; bridle and head collar complete; blankets for trooper and horse; flounce; sheepskin and shabraque for a Light Dragoon; waterdeck, nosebag and cornsack; forage net, picketing peg, tools; haversack and waterbottle; pouch belt, and pouch containing 30 rounds of ammunition; sword, scabbard, belt and sabretache; pistols and carbine; rations for horse and man.

Cavalry messtin, assembled. Introduced in about 1870, this item endured until the end of the horse in military service. Its dimensions were such that it could fit into the valise, which was 6½ins. in diameter. (Collection of Alan Simpson)



The most significant occurrence regarding British cavalry equipment in the years 1800–15 was the progress made towards uniformity. It would be many years before the purchase of saddlery, etc., would be taken out of the hands of colonels, but the precedent of universal patterns of equipment was established at this time.

1815–90

(Plates D and E)

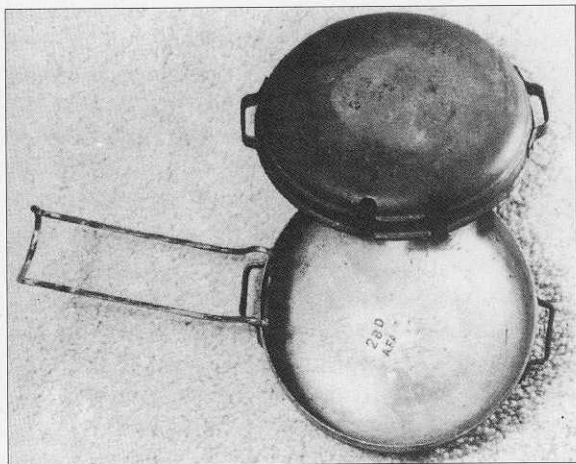
The year 1815 ushered in a period of almost 40 years of peacetime soldiering for the British Army at home. The campaigns of the previous 22 years had given Britain one of the most efficient armies in Europe; but, with Napoleon defeated, it was reduced in strength and allowed to lapse into what was virtually a state of suspended animation. Complacency on the part of the men who had led it to its spectacular victories, and the British public's customary regard for its army in peacetime, combined to produce a situation where little in the way of newer doctrine or equipment was even considered. The British Army that arrived in the Crimea in 1853 differed little from that which had fought under Wellington at Waterloo except in lacking his decisive style of command; and it was the near-disaster which befell the British in Russia that led to the wave of military reforms so long overdue.

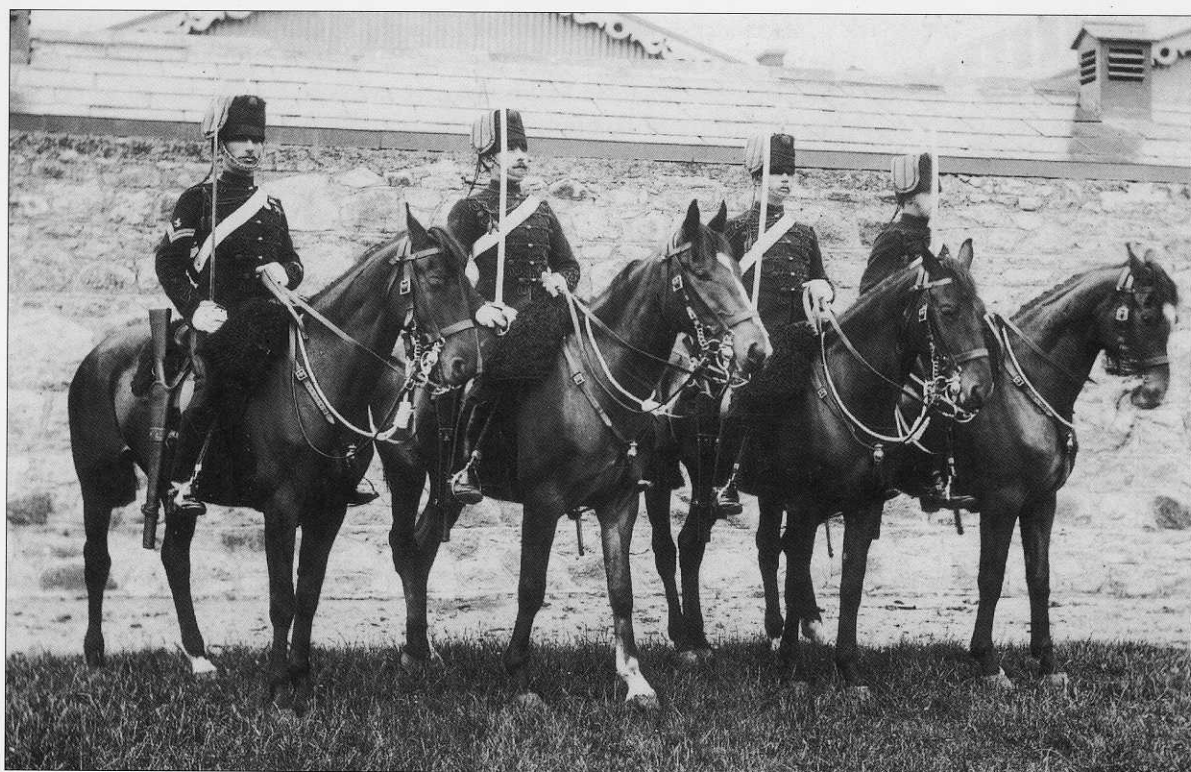
There had been a few ardent critics prior to the Crimean fiasco, but they were ignored by the general public and regarded with suspicion or even contempt by their fellow-officers. Notable among these voices crying in the wilderness was Captain Lewis E. Nolan, probably best remembered as the bearer of the fateful message which led to the tragic charge of the Light Brigade and, incidentally, his own death. Nolan was one of the school of young officers who had seen active service abroad, and was harshly critical of the organisation, training, equipment and weapons of the British cavalry establishment at home. He was also talented enough to get his criticism into print in his book *Cavalry, Its History and Tactics*, which was published – ironically – in the year of his death. Whether or not his book influenced the reformers in the years that followed the Crimea is hard to tell; but, in the field of saddlery and

weapons alone, most of the ideas that Nolan put forward were eventually incorporated into the designs accepted for service. (His name lived on in the first truly universal pattern saddle introduced in 1856, which was generally referred to as 'Nolan's Saddle'.)

From 1815 to 1853 there was little in the way of innovation in the field of British cavalry equipment. Saddlery and bridles for light and heavy cavalry were only modifications, if that, of the patterns of the Napoleonic period. Firearms underwent conversion from flint to percussion lock, thereby eliminating the need for new designs, but the same was not the case for the sword and the newly introduced lance. Both the light and heavy cavalry swords of 1796 were

Cavalry messtin, open, showing the handle extended and the loops for the messtin strap. (Collection of Alan Simpson)





A mounted piquet of the 3rd (King's Own) Hussars, Dublin, 1890s. They are armed with the 1885 pattern sword and Martini-Henry carbine. Note the 1885 pattern bridles, the sheepskins worn over their saddles, and the corporal's arm badge and medals for service in the Sudan, 1882. (Author's collection)

replaced, and in 1853 it was decreed that a single universal pattern of sword would be issued to all cavalry. This, in turn, was superseded by the 1864 and 1885 patterns of cavalry trooper's sword in the period under study. In the end there were eight separate patterns of sword in 75 years, a remarkable occurrence serving to illustrate that, while they were resistant to change in almost every other respect, the British cavalry could get quite excited about their 'arme blanche'.

The salutary experience of coming into contact with Napoleon's lancers led to the conversion of several regiments of light cavalry to lancers from 1816 onwards. Here, as with the sword, much experiment and discussion ensued before the British lance evolved into a nine-foot weapon with an ash or bamboo pole supporting several varieties of head and shoe. The 100-year British involvement with the lance led to much controversy regarding its usefulness. (As might be expected, Nolan, always a man of extreme opinions, was opposed to the lance and gave what now appear to be valid reasons for his point of view.) Whatever the arguments for and against, the British cavalry hierarchy, having decided to have lancers on their establishment, went the whole hog, and, as with hussars in previous years, dressed and equipped the new additions in a style that aped the originators of the trend. Thus the Polish lance-cap now joined the Hungarian hussar busby and the French crested helmet on the sweating heads of British troopers!

The introduction of the lance led to some discussion as regards the firearms to be carried by a lancer. Carbine butts interfered with the free use of the lance; pistols were the main firearm of lancer regiments, with a few carbines being kept for piquet duties, etc., but the establishment of pistols and carbines varied. At a time when pistols were falling out of

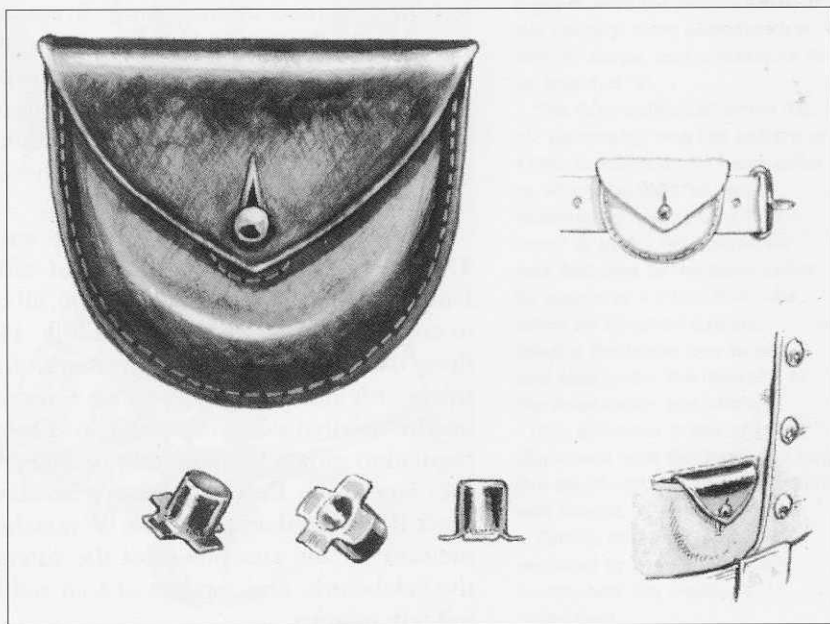
favour with the rest of the cavalry, a new design of percussion-lock, single shot pistol was introduced for lancers in 1842. This pistol served on for other ranks until replaced by the Enfield revolver in 1880, by which time only a few troopers, such as trumpeters, etc., were thus armed. By this time the gradual introduction of more efficient breech-loading carbines had resolved the problems associated with muzzle-loading on horseback, and most troopers were carbine-armed. Starting with the Westley Richards 'Monkey-tail' carbine, introduced in 1861, the cavalry breech-loaders of the period were the Snider and eventually the Martini-Henry carbines. The demise of the muzzle-loading swivel carbine saw an end to the items of personal equipment associated with it, i.e. cap pouches and carbine sling-belts. Henceforth the trooper wore a simple pouch belt to contain the cartridges for his breech-loading carbine. New, too, in the field of personal equipment was the 'Oliver' waterbottle introduced in the 1870s, and the circular cavalry messin. But all these innovations came after the Crimean débâcle.

It was while the Crimean War was still at its height that the first moves were made to introduce a standard saddle for the cavalry, and these led to the adoption of the 'Universal Wood Arch Saddle' of 1856. This, the first pattern of saddle for both light and heavy cavalry, was a sound design which served on for many years, surviving the efforts of newer designs to supplant it. Indeed, some 1856 pattern saddles were still in use at the end of the century in the South African War. In 1860 a universal pattern of bridle was accepted for general use also, thus replacing the previous light and heavy cavalry patterns and ensuring that from this date on all troopers of British cavalry rode horses with a standard pattern of saddle and bridle. Gradually the distinctions between light and heavy cavalry began to be eroded, so that by the time cavalry went into decline in the 20th century the difference was in name only.

At least one personal account of life in the ranks of a cavalry regiment in the 1870s records the clothing and equipment issued to a lancer recruit. The writer starts by expressing his astonishment at the complexity of his kit and then goes on to itemise it. From his list it is clear that little had changed since the early years of the century. The valise was still on issue, as was the 1842 pattern pistol, pouch and cap-case – all these in 1877.

Another consequence of the post-Crimea reforms was the supplanting of the Board of Ordnance as the agency responsible for the production of

Caps and cap pouches. In the cavalry, pouches for percussion caps were worn on the sword belt, tucked into the tunic or – as in the infantry – fastened to the pouch belt.



cavalry equipment and its replacement by successive Boards of Cavalry Officers. The lively argument and differing opinion that ensued from these august bodies did not always produce the answer to problems that had dogged the cavalry for years, particularly that of the load carried by the cavalry mount; but it led to standardisation and a realistic system of supply, as well as gradual improvements in the design of cavalry equipment. Overseas, particularly in India, a great deal of obsolete or local equipment remained in use for years after it had been phased out at home. As the 19th century drew to a close the cavalry arm of the British Army move towards the last great contest in which it would play a decisive part – the South African War.

1890–1914

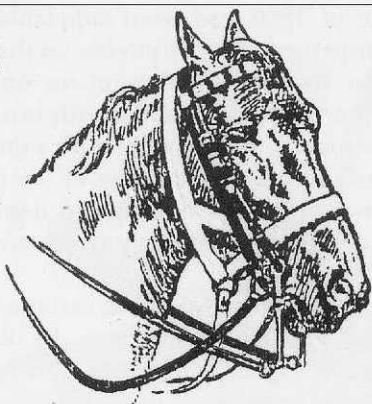
(Plate F)

Despite the experience gained in the succession of minor wars that preceded it, the outbreak of the South African War in 1899 found the British Army ill-prepared for the way in which the contest would be fought. If there were visionaries abroad at the time capable of predicting that a handful of citizen-soldiers on ponies could tie down a modern European army to a campaign that would last for almost three years, it is certain they went unheeded. The fact that the war, as it developed, would require more and more mounted men was also unappreciated, and the subsequent call for large quantities of cavalry equipment found the Ordnance services unable to meet demands.

In this crisis a variety of saddlery and other cavalry equipment was pressed into service, with contractors stretched to fill rush orders and even foreign equipment being bought up. To answer the call for mounted men, Yeomanry and Colonial volunteer units were hastily formed and sent off to the war and, to the horror of the Regular cavalryman, infantry were horsed in the manner of the dragoons of old to form Mounted Infantry units. Eventually the extra mobility necessary to defeat the Boers in the vast expanses of the Veldt was achieved, and the last great campaign in which a British mounted army played the major part was enacted. The story of the equipment used by all mounted troops in the South African War of 1899–1902 is a long and complex one, however, and attention will be paid here only to the equipment of the British Regular cavalry units.

The regulation saddle of the time was the universal pattern of 1890. This had evolved from a series of saddles designed to replace the Universal Wood Arch Saddle of 1856, all of which had proved, in one way or another, inferior to 'Nolan's Saddle'. However, experience gained with these designs led to the development of a saddle incorporating wooden sideboards and steel arches with a one-piece seat. Various improvements on the original design resulted in the 1898 modification and this, the regulation saddle at the outbreak of the South African War, was termed the 'Steel Arch Universal Pattern Saddle, 1890 pattern, Mark III'. The Mark III featured an adjustable 'V' attachment for the girth, an improved method for the attachment of the stirrup leathers, 'Numnah' pads for the sideboards, and a range of four saddle sizes to suit the backs of all military mounts.

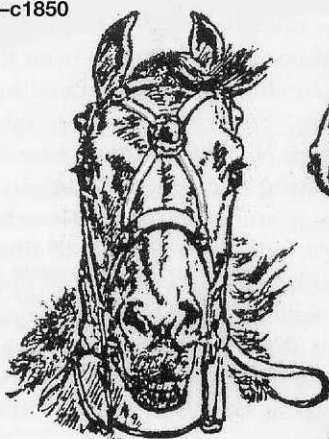
1780



1812



1812-c1850



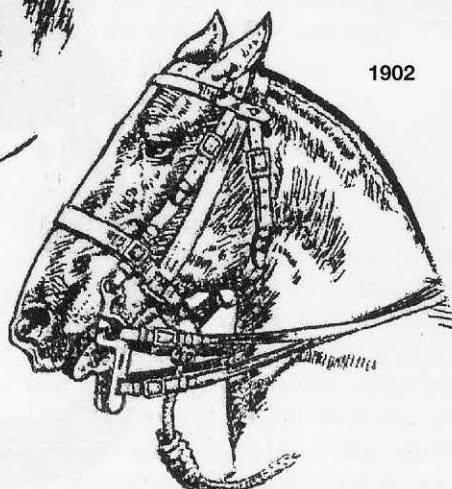
1860



1885



1902



Harry Payne drawing showing the development of cavalry bridles, 1780-1902, top to bottom. That of 1780 was a simple affair over a webbing halter. The curb bit had perfectly straight bars, and the brow band was decorated in regimental colours.

The Light Cavalry bridle of 1812 had the crossed face-pieces and rosettes copied from Hungarian bridles. The curb bit had curved bars; the leather halter worn beneath it had its strap bound up, and the throat lash was worn loose with a tassel ornament.

The face-pieces remained popular until the middle years of the century, worn sometimes in this 'X' shape, and sometimes as an inverted 'Y'.

The first 'universal' bridle (i.e. for all cavalry) was the pattern of 1860, consisting of a head-collar to which the curb bit was fastened by means of a 'bridle head' or strap; the snaffle bit was fastened to the head-collar by means of a T-bar. Both bits could be removed quickly, leaving the horse free to water and feed under the restraint of the head-collar and chain.

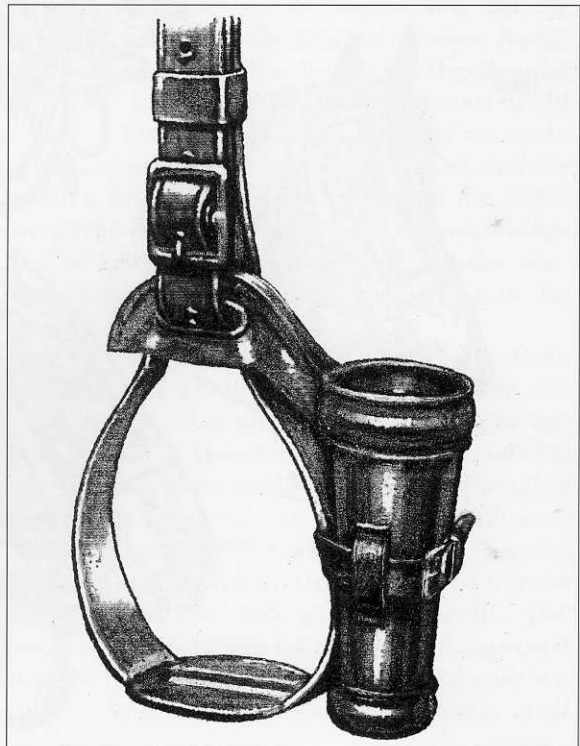
The universal bridle of 1885 dispensed with the T-bar and had the snaffle bit secured by a chain and buckle.

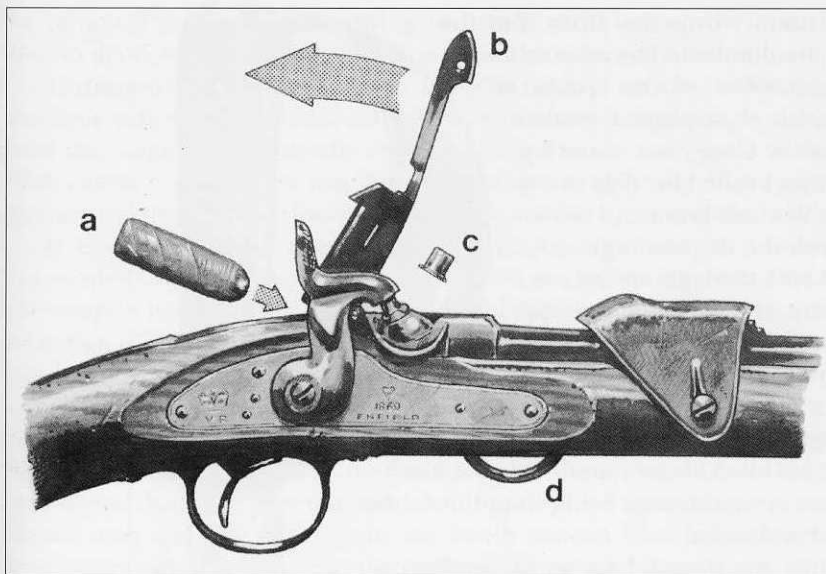
Finally, the double bit was replaced by the 1902 pattern 'portmouth' bit. (Author's collection)

The Universal Pattern Bridle of 1860 had been supplanted by a modified design in 1885 which dispensed with the sidebar on the snaffle bit and replaced it with a chain attachment. Breastplates no longer fastened directly to the saddle but fitted like a collar with two tabs to join them to the sideboards. Cruppers, always of dubious value, were discarded. Wallets, shoeboxes and carbine buckets were of the patterns used previously; but the valise was no longer a campaign item, being relegated with shabraques and the like, to the category of ceremonial trappings.

With the introduction of the Lee-Metford magazine carbine in 1894 the pouch belt too became a full-dress ceremonial item. Its place was taken by the bandolier, the first pattern of which held 50 rounds of .303in. ammunition. Bandoliers were carried 'on the man' as were the waterbottle and haversack. Troopers armed with revolvers had for many years carried these weapons in a pistol case secured to a waist belt. Swords, on campaign, were strapped to the shoebox, as they had been for many years. The problem of what should or should not be carried upon the saddle continued to cause argument. Experience against the lightly equipped Boers led to the abandonment of all but absolute essentials, but even so the cavalry horse was still carrying a considerable weight. Lance, carbine and sword with 150 rounds of ammunition accounted for two stone (28lbs.) and rations for horse and man a further stone. The Mounted Infantry, unencumbered with lance and sword and dispensing with all but the barest essentials rode lighter – but not much. A newspaper report of 1901 lists the following as the field equipment of a cavalry trooper in South Africa: saddle, wallets and carbine bucket; bridle complete; spare horseshoes and nails in shoebox; lance, carbine and

From 1872 saddles with iron or steel arches began to replace those with wooden arches reinforced with metal. Shown here, stripped to its saddle-tree, is the 1890 pattern Steel Arch saddle, which was developed from three previous designs named the Flat Iron Arch, and two patterns of Angle Iron Arch. The 1890 pattern underwent two further modifications, in 1902 and 1912, until the steel arch design was perfected. Also shown here is one of the several designs of boot for the butt of a lance; usually attached to both stirrups, boots enable the lance to be carried either slung or vertically. (Author's collection)





Breech mechanism, the Westley-Richards cavalry carbine. The first cavalry breech-loader, the Westley-Richards was a 'capping' carbine. The cartridge (a) was inserted into the breech once the breech-lever (b) had been raised. With the breech-lever closed the percussion-cap (c) was placed on the breech-nipple and the weapon could be fired. Note the leather backsight cover, and the ring (d) for the carbine belt swivel. Weight 7lbs.; length 3ft. 4ins.; calibre .476in.

sword; 150 rounds of ammunition; bandolier, messin and waterbottle; rations for man and horse; greatcoat, blanket, numnah; forage net, cornsack, etc. All the kit listed was weighed, giving a total of 115lbs.; with the average weight of the rider reckoned at 166lbs., the total load for the horse was 281lbs. or just over 20 stone. Officers now rode a saddle of a design more akin to a hunting saddle than that of the troopers. This marked a departure from previous practice where officers' saddles were similar to the

men's, the difference being mainly that of superior manufacture and quality.

As regards dress, the South African War saw the relegation of full dress to the function of ceremonial wear only. The Khaki Service Dress of drill, cord or serge material in which the British Army fought the war became the prototype for the universal pattern Service dress introduced in 1902 for wear at home and abroad. The scarlet and gold of yore had only 12 years to run.

The lessons learned in the campaigns against the Boers were put to good use by the British Military establishment in the years 1902 to 1914. Organisation, weapons, equipment and training were all reviewed in the light of the recent war, and the reform that followed brought the Army to a peak of efficiency which has probably never been equalled, before or since. The cavalry, too, was brought to a state of excellence as the time ticked away towards the Great War. Led by cavalry generals who had won their reputations and their promotions in the war of horse mobility across the plains and mountains of South Africa, the British cavalry faced the coming war determined to play the decisive role it saw as its duty and right.

1914-41

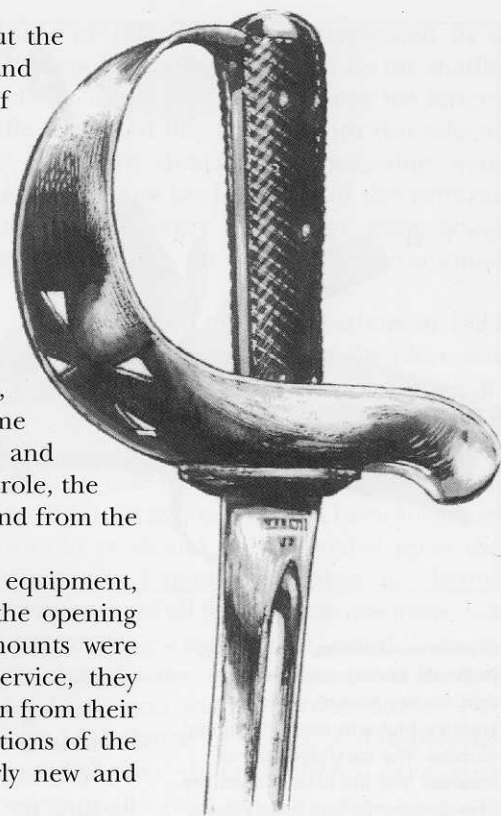
(Plates G and H)

By now, the story of the British cavalry divisions serving on the Western Front in the First World War has passed into legend. Their first nightmare encounters with machine guns, their ever-increasing use as stop-gap infantry; the spectacle of masses of men and horses waiting to exploit breakthroughs that never happened – all are themes that have been so well recorded that few students of military history can be unaware of the inglorious fate suffered by the British cavalry in the mud of France and Flanders. Not so well publicised is the part played by cavalry in the Middle East, where the mobility of the mounted columns

helped to bring about eventual victory over the Turks. But the years of war from 1914 to 1918 were dominated by infantry and artillery. The unprecedented expansion of the armies of Britain and her Empire (84 British, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand infantry divisions alone, not counting the contribution of the Indian Army) called for only three divisions of British cavalry on the Western Front and two in the Middle East. Although most of the Regular regiments of cavalry remained in a horsed role throughout the war, the fate suffered by the majority of the Yeomanry was ignominious. Few regiments survived as cavalry, most being eventually 'absorbed' as infantry after conversion as cyclists, or years of waiting to fight in a role that gradually became redundant. Thus only three regiments of Regular cavalry and seven of Yeomanry served in the Middle East in a mounted role, the greater part of the mounted force in that theatre being found from the armies of Australia, New Zealand and India.

It follows, therefore, that while the demand for arms, equipment, clothing and horses may have been great, particularly in the opening years of the war, little of the materiel and few of the mounts were required by the cavalry. Alone of all the arms of the service, they actually suffered what would ultimately prove to be a reduction from their 1914 establishment. The war brought about only modifications of the basic cavalry equipment of 1914, most of which was fairly new and well-designed.

The standard saddle of the time is a good illustration. Approved two years before the outbreak of war, it had only begun to replace the 1902 modification of the 1890 pattern Universal saddle by 1914. The 1912 Universal Pattern was to be the final pattern of saddle for the British Army, and remains in service to this day. Its main feature is the jointing of its steel arches to allow the adjustment of the sideboards to suit the back of any mount. Another feature of the 1912 UP saddle is the webbing woven between the front and rear arches to support the leather of the seat. Otherwise, in outward appearance, the saddle is similar to that which it replaced. This, of course, makes it difficult to identify the 1912 from the 1902 in photographs, except where a direct comparison can be made – in this case the slightly lower rear arch and longer seat of the later pattern is apparent. Modifications to the 1912 UP saddle involved only what was, or was not, strapped to it. These will be dealt with later. Unlike the saddle the Universal Pattern Bridle had been in service for many years prior to the outbreak of war. It was, in fact, a modification of the 1885 pattern UP Bridle and had appeared shortly after the South African War. As in the case of the 1912 UP saddle, this last pattern of bridle was a first-class design and survives, unmodified, to this day. The main feature is the bit. This is the single item which performs the function of both the curb and snaffle in previous designs. Known as the 'portmouth' or 'elbow' bit, it incorporates attachment points for the reins at the bar of the bit (to act as a snaffle) and at either of two places on the cheek-pieces (for varying leverage) to act through the fulcrum of the curb-chain. The 1902 Universal Pattern Bit is attached to the headstall, which is the basis of the bridle, by means of a single strap which loops through the brow-band. The bit cheek-strap and reins can



Hilt, 1864 pattern sword. This was simply the first universal pattern sword of 1853 with a sheet-steel bowl guard to replace the three-bar knuckle-bow.

be removed simply by unfastening two studs, thus leaving the mount free to drink or feed under the restraint of the halter chain or rope.

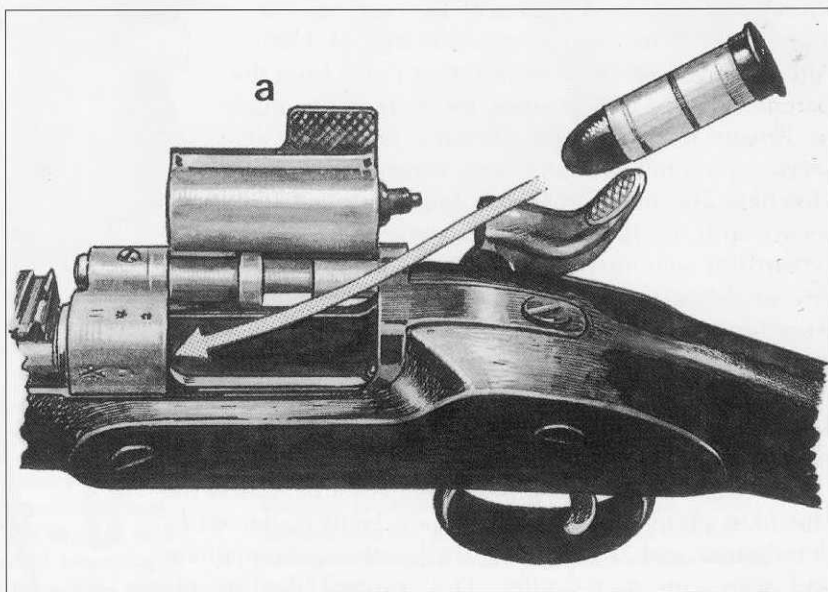
Turning to the weapons of the 1914–18 cavalry, we are confronted not only with the traditional combination of lance and sword, but also with the range of more deadly weapons devised in the early years of the 20th century. The cavalry may have ridden to war with swords strapped to their saddles, but they finished it with the machine gun and the bomb.

It is perhaps ironic that after centuries of argument as to what constituted the best design for a cavalry sword, perfection was found after the weapon had ceased to have a battlefield application. This perfection of design is now said to apply to the 1908 pattern cavalry sword. With its slim, tapering blade and its pistol-grip hilt, it is a thrusting weapon, originating more from the experiences of the gymnasium and drill-square than those of the battlefield. It replaced a thoroughly bad sword, the 1899 pattern; it is doubtful if a new design would have been considered had the previous model not proved so unsatisfactory and drawn such scathing criticism in the South African War. Nevertheless, both swords were in service at the outbreak of war and it was some time before the earlier pattern was replaced.

If, in retrospect, the importance attached to the design of swords in 1908 is surprising, the controversy then current over the employment of the lance gives reason to doubt the professional competence of the 'lance lobby' of the time. In the wake of the South African War there followed a series of reforms that combined to make the British Army one of the best armed, equipped and trained in the world. Much of the reform stemmed from experience gained in the late war, and, in 1903, the decision was taken to relegate the lance to the category of ceremonial item. Six years later an order was given that once more reclassified the lance as a weapon of war, and as such it was carried until it was finally reclassified a ceremonial item in 1927. The arguments in favour of the retention of the lance indicated poor appreciation of the way future wars would be fought. However, the 'lance lobby' was powerful, well-connected and not an exclusively British institution. Both French and German cavalymen rode the fields and highways of France and Flanders with their useless, steel-tipped cattle-prods.

If the value of the sword and lance had declined, the reverse was the case for the cavalryman's firearm, by now the rifle. (With dismounted action as his fate he soon had the addition of a bayonet, the better to play the part of foot-soldier.) Here, once again, the lessons of the South African War pointed

Snider breech mechanism. The first cavalry cartridge breech-loader. The breech-block (a) was swung open and the cartridge inserted. The block was then closed, and the weapon could be fired.



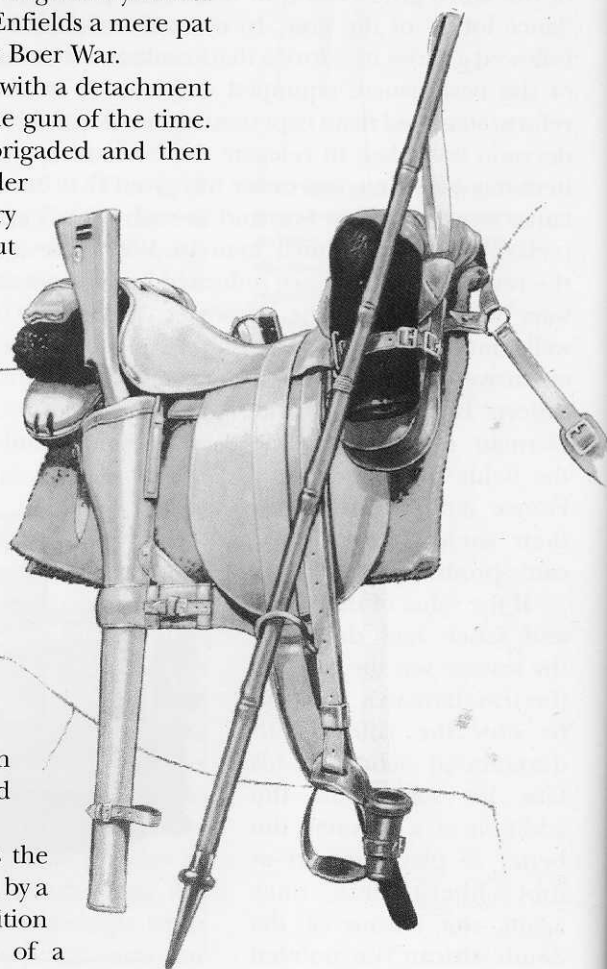
out the limited value of the cavalry carbine when compared to the rifle of the mounted infantry. A compromise was reached by lopping 5ins. off the barrel of the Lee-Enfield Rifle Mark I to produce the Short Rifle, Magazine, Lee-Enfield, a weapon considered as suitable for infantry, mounted infantry or cavalry. Although this was an undoubted improvement over the Lee-Metford and Lee-Enfield Cavalry Carbines the reduction in length of the Lee-Enfield rifle resulted in a reduction in its weight from 9¼ to between 8 and 8½lbs. This loss of recoil-absorbing weight may not have been critical at the time of the introduction of the short Lee-Enfield (1902), as the muzzle velocity of the ammunition in service at that time was just over 2,000 feet per second. But the subsequent introduction of Mark VII ammunition, with a muzzle velocity of 2,440 feet per second, resulted in the lighter rifle developing a quite unpleasant kick, a characteristic presumably unforeseen at the time of the compromise and one which anyone who has fired Mk VII ammunition from an SMLE rifle will bear out.

Millions of infantrymen were now landed with a rifle that was unpleasant to shoot, all in the cause of the standardisation of weapons between them and a comparative handful of cavalrymen! This situation persisted until after the demise of horse cavalry, when the introduction of the Number 4 rifle – with a weight of over 9lbs. – made Mk VII ammunition more acceptable to shoot. However, the long-serving cavalrymen of the Great War considered the kick of their short Lee-Enfields a mere pat in comparison to that of the 7½lb. Lee carbines of the Boer War.

Every British cavalry regiment went to war in 1914 with a detachment of Maxim machine guns, the standard British machine gun of the time. These, like the guns of the infantry, were at first brigaded and then withdrawn to form the Machine Gun Corps. In order to maintain integral machine gun support, infantry battalions were issued with the Lewis machine gun; but the cavalry decided that the Lewis was not for them. They looked around for something more suitable to the rough-and-tumble of pack transportation, and found what they considered to be the best available gun in the Benét-Mercié machine rifle of 1909. After purchase of the manufacturing rights from the parent company of Hotchkiss, the weapon was made in Britain to accept the standard British .303in. service ammunition and was classified as the Hotchkiss Machine Gun Mark I. As such it came into service with the British cavalry regiments from 1916 onwards. It continued in service with them, with few modifications except that of conversion from bipod to tripod mounting, until the last cavalry units were dismounted. Even then it remained a reserve weapon until declared obsolete in 1946, by which time its antiquated design contrasted starkly with the prototypes of the assault-rifle age.

Although it was chosen for its supposed handiness the Hotchkiss was never a one-man weapon, being operated by a detachment and being transported with its ammunition and spares on pack-saddles. This involved the use of a

The 1890 UP saddle rigged for marching order, c.1896. Note the arrangement for securing the lance to the saddle when the rider dismounted. Note also the Lee-Metford carbine boot with the straps for securing the picket-post.





Caton Woodville's splendid study of a cavalry trumpeter of the Boer War. The detail is unusually accurate. Note that trumpeters carried both trumpet and bugle by now. Note also the chain-mail epaulettes, pistol, looped-up sword slings, spare boots strapped to the wallets, cloak

and picketpost behind saddle, sword and cornsack strapped to saddle; and 1885 pattern bridle, which differed from the previous pattern only in that the snaffle-bit attached to the halter with a chain instead of a T-bar.

complicated system of containers and straps, with the constant danger of a horse carrying something vital being killed or bolting. Most vulnerable were the metal feed strips, which needed robust packaging to keep damage, and stoppages, to a minimum. Feed strip boxes were made of wood, steel and leather or all leather depending on whether they were made to carry 14-round or 30-round strips. A bandolier was issued to carry the smallest, nine-round strips. The distinctive shape of the Hotchkiss bandolier, with its large rectangular pockets, was the distinguishing mark of a cavalry machine gunner. So also was the Webley pistol, by 1915 developed to its final configuration, the Mark VI.

Pistols were also carried by sergeant-majors and trumpeters, who had been so armed for many years. The first Webley revolvers had begun to replace the Enfields in 1887 and had proved themselves to be robust and reliable. By far the most numerous of all the Webleys was the Mark VI, of which over 300,000 were made. (It being the official service weapon meant that most, but by no means all, cavalry officers bought the Webley revolver.)

The weapons described were carried in a variety of containers, mostly attached to the saddle. Lances were still carried with their butts lodged in 'buckets' which were strapped to the stirrup. Swords were still strapped to horseshoe cases on the nearside of saddles, with rifles being carried in larger 'buckets' on the opposite side. (Troopers carrying lances switched sides for sword and rifle so as to prevent the butt of the rifle interfering with the free use of the lance.) Small arms ammunition

(continued on page 33)

BELOW (a) Snaffle bit. Usually jointed as shown with the reins applying pressure in the direction of the arrows.

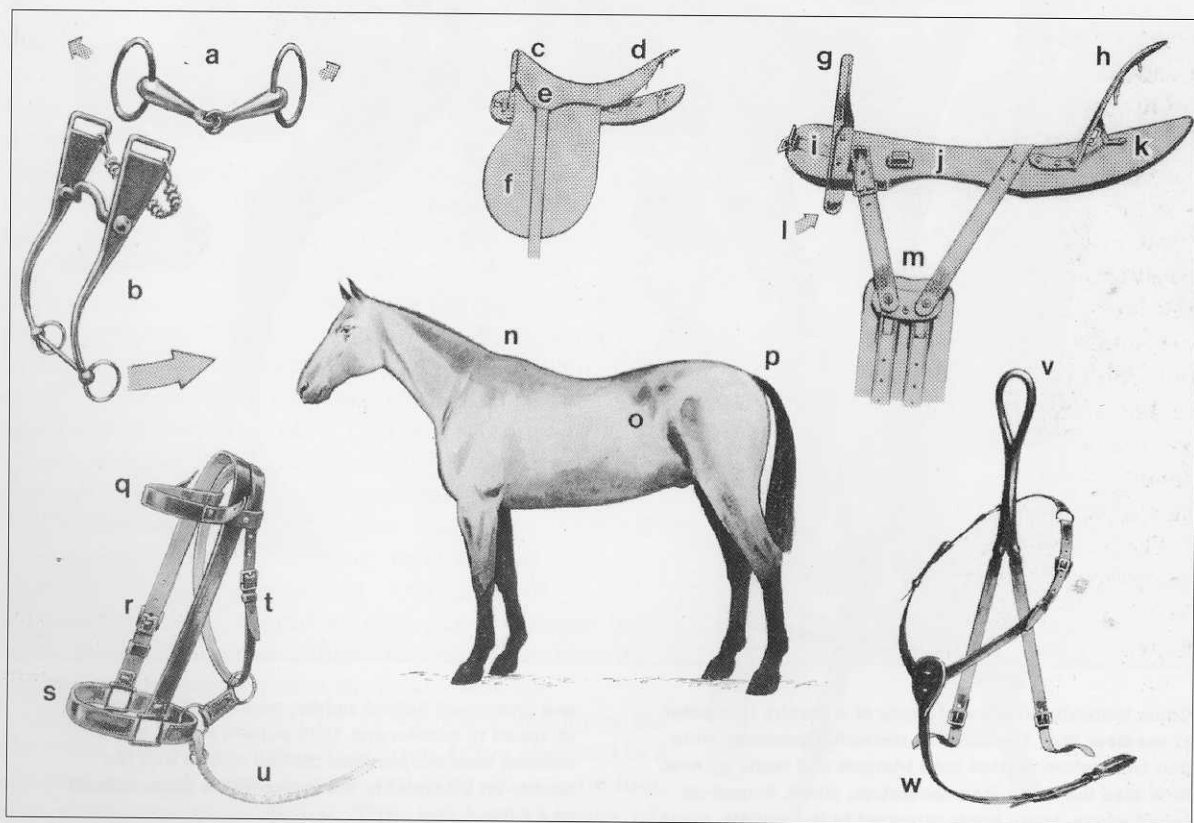
(b) Curb bit. The arrow indicates the direction of rein leverage.

The fulcrum in this case is the curb chain.

Saddle parts (c) pommel (d) cantle (e) skirt (f) flap (g) front arch (h) rear arch (i) bur (j) sideboard (k) fan (l) point (m) girth.

Parts of horse (n) withers – great care had to be taken when saddling up to ensure that no part of the equipment bore on this part of the horse; (o) flanks (p) dock.

A bridle/halter consisting of (q) brow band (r) cheek piece (s) nose band (t) throat lash (u) halter rope. (v) A crupper (w) A breastplate.



THE LATE 18th CENTURY

1: Sergeant, 10th Light Dragoons, c.1795

2: Private, 10th Light Dragoons, guard order

3: Equipment details



LIGHT CAVALRY, 1805-15

1: Private, 13th Light Dragoons, 1814

2: Corporal, 10th Light Dragoons (Hussars); Spain, 1813

3: Equipment details



HEAVY CAVALRY, 1796–1815

1: Private, 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons; Belgium, 1815

2: Sergeant, 2nd (Royal North British) Dragoons;
Belgium, 1815

3: Equipment details

1

2

3



LIGHT CAVALRY, 1816–54

1: Private, 4th (Queen's Own) Light Dragoons; Crimea, 1854

2: Private, 9th Light Dragoons (Lancers); dismounted drill, 1817



THE FIRST UNIVERSAL EQUIPMENTS

1: Corporal, 9th (Queen's Own) Lancers; Afghanistan, 1880

2: Equipment details



LATE 19th CENTURY EQUIPMENT
Private, 21st Lancers; Egypt, 1898



THE GREAT WAR, 1914-18

3rd Cavalry Division, France, 1918

1: Private, 17th (Duke of Cambridge's Own) Lancers

2: Sergeant, 7th (Princess Royal's) Dragoon Guards

3: Hotchkiss Mk I machine gun



THE FINAL YEARS, 1920–41
Lance-Corporal,
4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards;
India, 1922



was carried in pouches and bandoliers worn on the body of the trooper or around his horse's neck. Extra ammunition and grenades could be carried in the wallets on the front arch of the saddle.

As the war progressed more and more items of equipment were wished on horse and rider. The need to carry more ammunition resulted in the waist belt and pouches of the 1903 infantry equipment being issued to cavalry, followed by the 'horse collar' bandolier. The bayonet was first worn attached to the bandolier and then to the waist belt in the normal manner.

Respirators appeared in 1915, helmets became a universal issue in 1916, and the 'small box' respirator replaced the earlier pattern the following year. Gas – of course – struck at both rider and horse; although the anti-gas instructions of the time suggested that horses were less affected, the lie is given by sickening photographs of the eyes and hooves of horses subjected to mustard gas which can still be seen at the headquarters of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps. In time respirators for horses were developed, although they were crude contraptions by comparison with those designed for humans. Anti-gas precautions for horses included washing down parts of the animal affected by mustard gas, binding up their eyes, strapping on an empty nosebag to prevent it drinking or cropping at contaminated pools or grass, and the use of a nosebag full of wet hay as a crude respirator. Very sophisticated respirators, eyeshields and protective 'garments' were developed for horses in the years following the First World War, but these were never put to the test.

The typical active service equipment of a cavalry trooper in the later years of the Great War included:

On the man in addition to his clothing – helmet, waterbottle, haversack, respirator, bandolier with 90 rounds of small arms ammunition, belt with bayonet and 50 rounds of small arms ammunition. On the horse – saddle complete, bridle complete, wallets, shoe case, rifle and lance buckets, 'horse collar' bandolier with 90 rounds of small arms ammunition, lance, sword and scabbard, rifle, two blankets, mess tin, canvas bucket, cornsack, haynet, picketing peg, greatcoat, rations for man and horse, groundsheet, 'small kit', any extra ammunition ordered to be carried, and two grenades.

The weight now being carried by a troop horse was greater than it had ever been in the history of the British cavalry service. This was of little consequence on the Western Front, where movement was limited for most of the war, but was an enormous problem in the Middle East, where distances covered were great and conditions of climate and terrain cruel. However, with only two Regular regiments in the Mesopotamian theatre, the problems of the Middle East were not broadly experienced by the British Regular cavalry.

With the Armistice British cavalry moved into a 20-year period that saw reduction by disbandment and amalgamations from 31 to 22 regiments followed by a period of conversion to an armoured role in the programme of mechanisation. The first two regiments (11th Hussars and 12th Royal Lancers) became armoured car units in 1929; and ten years later there were only three Regular regiments still with horses and available for the formation of a cavalry division in the Middle East. The remainder were Yeomanry, and it was this 1st Cavalry Division that

constituted the last wartime British cavalry formation. After service in Palestine and Transjordan it was disbanded in 1941. (It should be noted that, although the cavalrymen moved on to perform a role more suited to modern war, their horses continued to serve as pack transport animals throughout the Second World War and for many years afterwards.) The horsed units of the present-day British Army perform a role that is primarily ceremonial.

The equipment of the British cavalry in its twilight years was that with which it had fought its last war. With the cavalry arm in decline after the Armistice it would have been surprising indeed if new designs of equipment had been accepted to supersede the saddlery thrown up as surplus by reductions and amalgamations. And yet a set of personal equipment in webbing, special to cavalry troopers, was designed by the Mills equipment company in the 1930s and saw limited use.

The load borne by the cavalry horse in the inter-war years was progressively reduced to 16 stone by the relegation of certain items of equipment to unit transport, and the abandonment of others. By these expedients the troop horse was at last carrying what had been considered for many years to be the optimum weight. With the load right, equipment design near perfection, the accumulated knowledge of centuries and living experience of two great wars, the Regular regiments of British cavalry served out their last years with horses with a degree of professional competence unequalled in their history.

GLOSSARY

Arch The bridge – made of either wood, reinforced with metal or metal alone – joining together the wooden ‘sideboards’ of a saddle-tree. The front arch forms the ‘pommel’ of the saddle and the rear arch the ‘cantle’.

Bar That part of a bit which passes through a horse’s mouth. Another name for a saddle-tree sideboard.

Bit A metal device, bearing on the jaws of a horse, by means of which control of the animal may be exercised through the medium of reins.

Boot A small leather tube used to secure the muzzle of a carbine.

Bridoon The term for a snaffle bit when used with a curb bit to form ‘bit and bridoon’.

Breastplate a ‘Y’-shaped harness, fastening to the saddle above and the girth below to prevent the saddle slipping backwards.

Bridle A set of straps for a horse’s head with which the bit or bits are held in place.

Bucket A leather device to carry a rifle, carbine or lance butt. A canvas article for watering a horse.

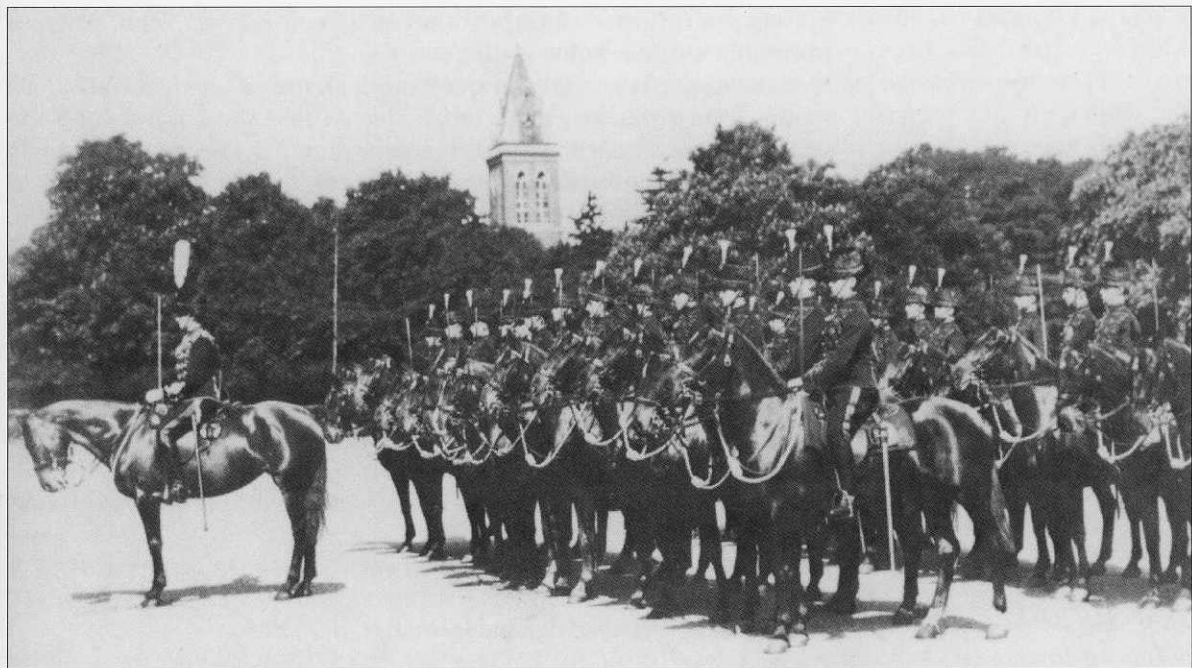
Burs The continuation of the saddle-tree sideboards beyond the front arch.

Canteen A waterbottle. The term is sometimes used, rather confusingly, to indicate what would now be termed a mess tin.

Cantle The edge of the rear arch of a saddle-tree.

Cheeks The side parts of a bridle or bit.

Cloak A large, voluminous garment with a separate cape issued to cavalry as protection against cold and wet weather. When strapped to the front arch it was rolled to the length of a sword before being attached.



Crupper A strap running from the rear of the saddle and under the horse's dock. Meant to prevent the saddle slipping forward.

Curb bit A bit with a curb-chain and lever-like cheeks.

Dock The upper, bony part of a horse's tail.

Draught Horses harnessed to pull a vehicle.

Dragoons In their original (early 18th-century) form, soldiers who rode to the battle to dismount and fight as infantry.

Fan The continuation of the saddle-tree side board rearward beyond the rear arch.

Flap The leather pieces hanging downwards from the sideboards of a saddle against which the rider's knees bear.

Flounce A leather guard to prevent the reins from chafing the cloak when rolled and strapped above the holsters or wallets.

Girth A band of leather, webbing or canvas encircling the body of the horse to hold the saddle in place.

Gullets The metal reinforcing plates securing wooden arches to the sideboards on a saddle-tree.

Halter A head-harness of leather, webbing or rope for tying up a horse, usually by means of a rope, chain or rein attached.

Holster A tubular, leather case for holding a pistol. Usually made in pairs and strapped across the pommel of a saddle. (Not to be confused with the pistol case carried on a belt.)

Holster Caps Originally flaps to protect pistols in holsters, they developed into highly decorative items bearing lace and regimental crests, etc. On campaign the rolled cloak, etc., did away with the need for them, so that they had become, by the early 19th century, ceremonial trappings only.

Housings A cloth meant to cover the horse's flanks. Its original practical purpose is obscure and, by the early 19th century, it had developed into a very ornate piece of equipment, displaying regimental devices, etc. The

4th Hussars, full dress, early 1900s. The 1902 pattern bridles and saddles are well shown, as are the 1908 pattern swords. The condition of the horses is magnificent. Note the regimental cypher stencilled on the saddle-blanket of the nearest trooper (centre), a hark-back to the days of the shabraque. (Aldershot Military Historical Trust)

prerogative of heavy cavalry, it was rarely seen on campaign, where a plain saddle blanket took its place.

Messtin A metal dish, lid and body, in which the cavalryman cooked his rations, and from which he ate them. At first the cavalry used the standard issue 'D'-sectioned tin, but were eventually issued with a small, circular tin which fitted the valise end exactly.

Nearside The left side of a horse.

Nosebag A canvas, bucket-shaped item into which feed for a horse is put, after which it is clipped to the halter to allow the animal to feed.

Noseband That part of a bridle passing around the horse's head above the mouth.

Numnah A piece of thick felt, usually yellowish in colour, used as padding between the sideboard of a saddle and the saddle blanket. Sometimes used in place of a saddle blanket.

Offside The right side of a horse.

Picketing Peg A wood and metal post which was driven into the ground to tie up a horse.

Points The extensions of the front arch below the sideboards of a saddle-tree.

Pommel Another term for the front arch of saddle.

Portsmouth bit A bit, the bar of which has a 'U'-shaped centre.

Reins Leather straps connecting the bits with the rider's hands and through which control of the horse may be exercised in conjunction with the rider's knees, body position and spurs. Cavalrymen did not use whips, needing to keep at least one hand free for the use of weapons.

Remount The term applied to a horse when bought into military service.

Sabretache The leather pocket attached by two (at one time three) straps to the sword-belt. Relegated to the category of ceremonial trapping after the Crimean War, it disappeared in the 1890s.

Saddle-tree A framework of wood and metal used as the 'skeleton' of a saddle. Found in all military saddles studied in this book. Each cavalry regiment had a 'saddle-tree maker' and staff on establishment as well as saddlers.

Shabraque A cloth cover which went over the saddle, to cover it front and rear, and the flanks of the horse. Lined with leather and extensively embroidered with regimental lace and devices, it was a heavy item, and was used in conjunction with a sheepskin and surcingle and shabraque straps. Rarely seen on active service after the early years of the 19th century; it was a light cavalry item but was also used by heavy cavalry in the 19th century.

Sheepskin Precisely that: a black or white skin edged and backed with decorative cloth and fastening over the saddle and, if used, the shabraque. At first a light cavalry item mainly associated with the 1805 Hussar saddle, it disappeared, except for ceremonial, when the saddle was replaced.

Sideboards The pieces of a saddle-tree joining the arches and transmitting the weight of the rider to the back of the horse.

Skirt The small flaps of a saddle which cover the attachment points of the stirrup leathers.

Snaffle A bit, usually jointed in the middle with a ring at either end for the rein and attachment to the harness.

Spoon The projection at the highest point of the cantle of a saddle. Usually with a slot or D for the attachment of the valise, etc.

Stirrups The harness to support the rider's feet, consisting of stirrup irons for the feet and stirrup leathers for attachment to the saddle.

Stone The unit of weight in use during the period covered in this book and in which the load borne by a troop horse was calculated. A stone was 14lbs. or 6.35 kilograms.

Surcingle A leather strap which goes over the saddle, etc., and around the body of the horse.

Valise A tubular container of cloth and leather strapped behind the saddle, usually bearing regimental devices on the circular ends. Valises were usually 'hollowed' in the centre to prevent pressure on the horse's back. Discarded completely in the 1890s.

Wallets Items replacing holsters about 1840 and strapped across the front arch of the saddle.

CHRONOLOGY

(It should always be borne in mind that the dates given below were those of the authorisation of the piece of equipment for general issue. The completion of an issue usually took many years.)

- 1796 A saddle, sword, pistol and carbine for heavy cavalry and a sabre for light cavalry.
- 1800 Considered to be the year of the introduction of the 'Paget' carbine for light cavalry.
- 1805 The 'Hussar' saddle for light cavalry.
- c.1808–10 Extensive conversion of cavalry weapons to swivel rammers.
- 1812 A standard bridle for light cavalry.
- 1816 Lance introduced to British cavalry service.
- 1820 New pattern lance.
- 1829 New pattern of three-bar hilted sword for light cavalry.
- 1830 New pattern of bowl-hilted sword for heavy cavalry.
- 1838 Pistols withdrawn from service except for lancers, trumpeters and sergeant-majors.
- 1840 New pattern lance. Wallets replace holsters.
- 1842 New (percussion) pistol for lancers.
- 1846 New pattern lance.
- 1853 New sword for all troopers of cavalry.
- 1856 First universal saddle, 'Nolan's'.
- 1860 First universal bridle. New pattern lance.
- 1861 First cavalry breech-loader, the Westley Richards.
- 1864 New pattern sword (1853 pattern with bowl hilt).
- 1867 Snider conversion of 1862 pattern carbine.
- 1868 New pattern lance.
- c.1870 'Oliver' waterbottle replaces the 'Italian' canteen. New cavalry messtin.
- 1871 Third and final single-shot breech-loader, the Martini-Henry.
- 1872 First of the three 'trial-and-error' saddles intended to replace the 1856 pattern, the UP Flat Iron Arch.

- 1878 Second 'trial-and-error' saddle. The UP Angle Iron Arch.
- 1880 Enfield revolver authorised to replace the 1842 pattern pistol.
- 1882 Two new pattern swords authorised the 1882 Cavalry Sword, Long, and the 1882 Cavalry Sword, Short.
- 1884 Third 'trial-and-error' saddle, another UP Angle Iron Arch.
- 1885 New universal bridle. New pattern sword.
- 1887 First pattern Webley revolver to replace the Enfield.
- 1890 New UP Steel Arch Saddle. New pattern sword (blade thicker and heavier than the previous pattern). Cruppers discarded. Between this date and 1900 valises and sabretaches, ceremonial items for many years, were discarded.
- 1894 Lee-Metford magazine carbine introduced.
- 1896 Lee-Enfield magazine carbine introduced.
- 1899 New pattern sword.
- 1902 New UP Steel Arch Saddle. New UP Bridle. First pattern of Short Lee-Enfield rifle approved as a universal weapon for cavalry, infantry, etc.
- 1908 Final pattern sword.
- 1912 Final pattern of UP Steel Arch Saddle. (Breastplates had by this time been discarded, their main use for many years having been as a means of displaying a regimental crest on ceremonial occasions.)
- 1914-41 Few changes in the basic equipment of the cavalryman except as noted in the body of the text.

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PLATES

A: THE LATE 18TH CENTURY

Cavalry equipment at this period was constructed to last for a long time – e.g. saddles for 16 years, and ‘accountrements’ for 20 years. Each regiment had on establishment craftsmen such as saddlers, saddle-tree makers and armourers, to repair and maintain equipment and arms to the full extent of their ‘life expectancy’. No article of equipment was cast away while still serviceable; therefore the patterns of saddle, sword, etc., sealed in 1796 took some time to replace those shown in this plate, which is based on a painting by Stubbs of the **10th (Prince of Wales’s Own) Light Dragoons at Windsor, c.1795**.

Figure **A1** shows a **sergeant** of the regiment; chevrons as badges of rank did not become universal in the British Army until 1803, but were being worn in the 10th Light Dragoons during the 1790s, when two bars indicated the rank of sergeant. He sits on a version of the ‘Hinde’ saddle, with a rolled cloak on the pillion behind the cantle. Note his Light Cavalry pattern 1788 sword, and the Elliott pattern 1760 carbine held at his side by its saddle boot and pouch-belt. Bridles were very simple affairs at this period, constructed to hold in place snaffle and curb bits and fastened over a webbing halter. The holster caps and housings are in the

regimental facing colour of yellow, and carry the crest of the Prince of Wales.

Figure **A2** depicts a **private** of the regiment in **guard order**. At this time the sword was carried on a shoulder-belt with slings, and could be hooked up for dismounted duties as illustrated. Note the short bayonet fixed to his Elliott carbine; its scabbard is attached to his sword-belt.

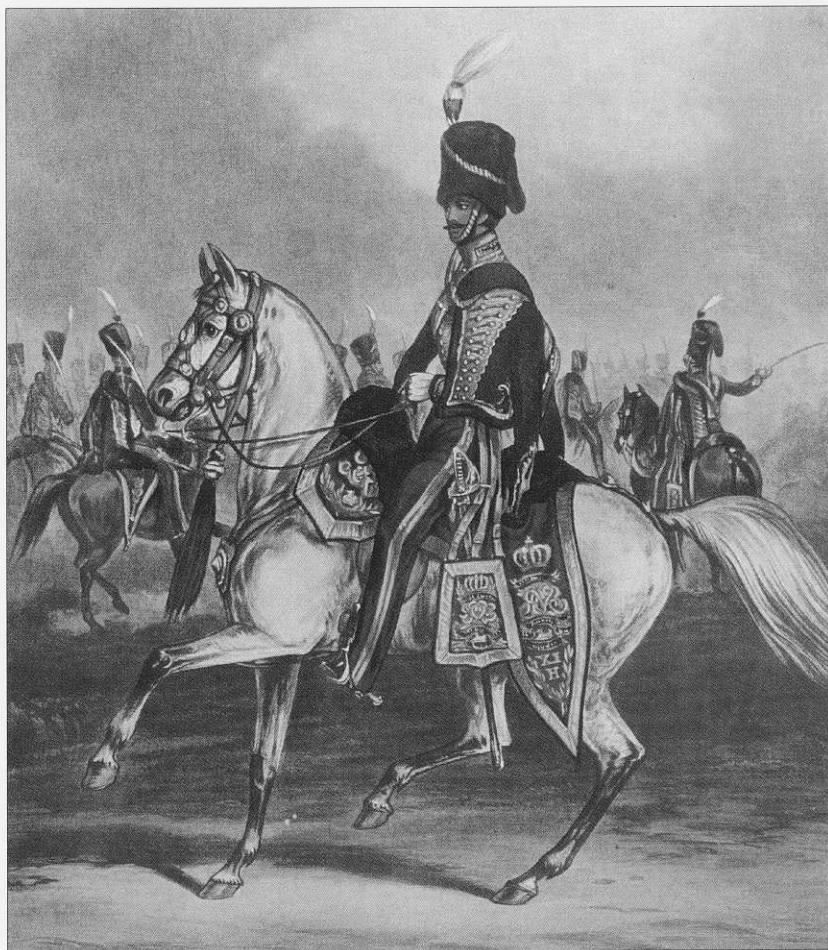
In the foreground at **A3** are a universal cavalry saddle of the type advocated by Hinde; a carbine pouch-belt; and a Light Dragoon pistol. The pouch illustrated might carry between 24 and 30 rounds of ammunition for the carbine and the single pistol. The saddle carries a pistol holster and a shoe case over its pommel, with a bearskin flounce above. Note the baggage pillion behind the cantle; the carbine boot below the shoe case; and the type of stirrups then in use.

B: LIGHT CAVALRY, 1805–15

B1: Private, 13th Light Dragoons, 1814

This figure is based on a print by Hamilton Smith, and shows a private saddling his mount. The 1805 pattern ‘Light Cavalry Universal’, ‘Hungarian’ or ‘Hussar’ saddle is shown partly assembled, above a blanket folded to nine thicknesses. Note the quilted leather pilch looped between the ‘spoons’ of the pommel and cantle; the rolled cloak above the holsters at the pommel (one of which in fact contains horseshoes and nails);

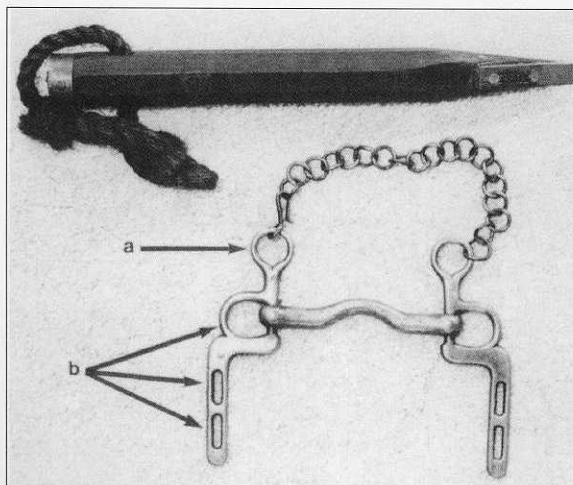
The magnificence of the uniform, saddlery and trappings of the officers of Queen Victoria’s cavalry is amply illustrated by this print by Ackerman of an officer of the ‘Cherry-pickers’ – **11th (Prince Albert’s Own) Hussars, c.1850**. Note the shabraque and sabretache heavily embroidered with bullion wire and coloured silks, both bearing the crest of Prince Albert. The officer paid for his mounts, his uniforms and all his equipment – only the very rich could afford commissions in the cavalry. (Author’s collection)





LEFT Heavy and Light Cavalry, 1812. Note the bridle and the stirrups, holsters, carbine boot, cornsack and picketing rope showing beneath the cloak of the heavy dragoon in the foreground. The voluminous cavalry cloaks, capes and headress foul-weather covers are also shown to advantage. (Parks of Canada)

OPPOSITE The kit of a hussar, c1904. Visible among the many items of clothing and equipment are: waterbottle and haversack; bandolier; sword, belt and slings; messtin strapped to greatcoat, all hung on the pegs above the bed. Below them is the muzzle of the lance-corporal's Long Lee-Enfield, indicating that the cavalry had rejected the carbine pending the issue of the SMLE. Personal equipment also shows that the 1903 bandolier equipment had not reached the 13th Hussars by 1904. (Aldershot Military Historical Trust)

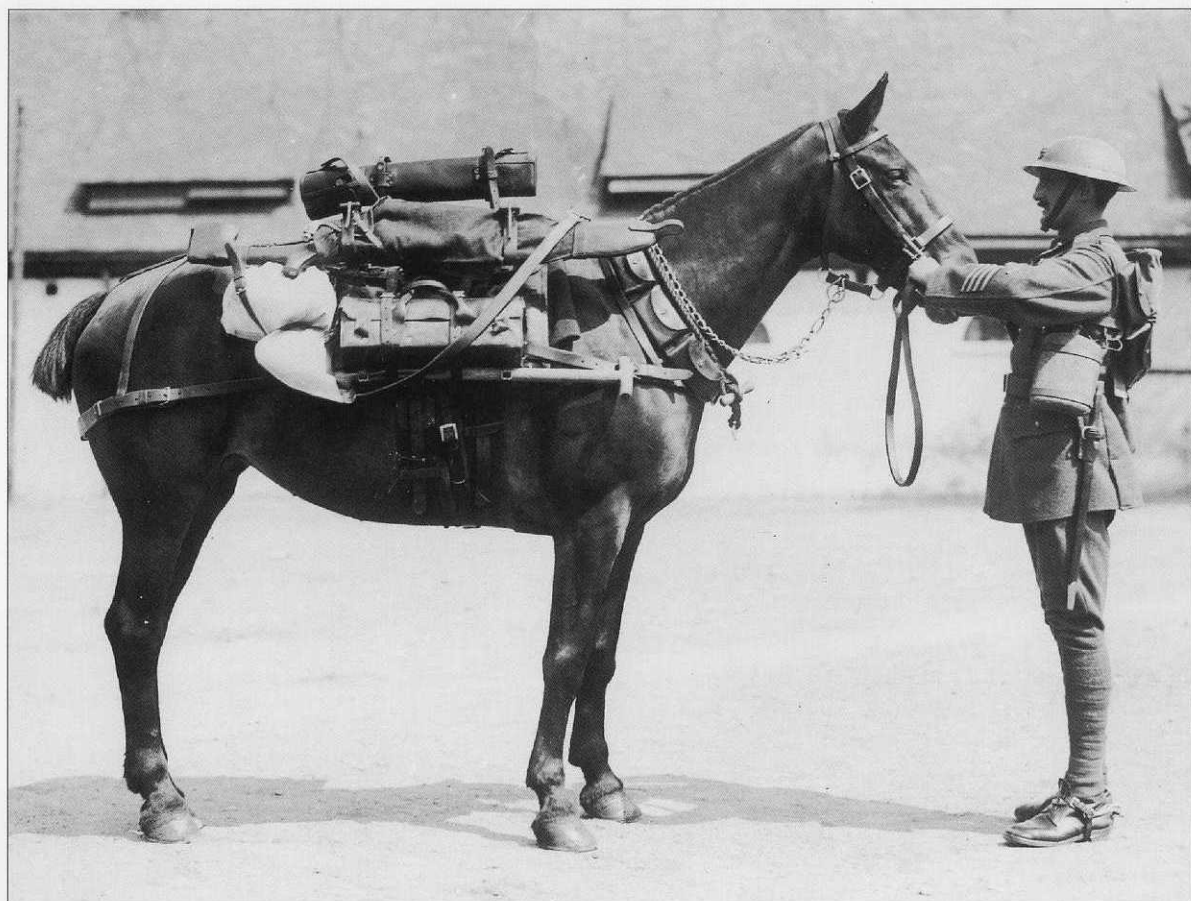


Picketing post; and 1902 pattern bit. The bridle fastened to the bit at point (a). The curb-chain was then passed around the horse's lower jaw. The reins fastened to the upper and one of the lower points (b), to exert pressure on the horse's mouth through the bar. (Collection of Alan Simpson)



Bandoliers from the 1903 equipment. The first pattern (below) accommodated 50 rounds, but these were modified for the cavalry by the addition of four extra pouches, to take 90 rounds. From 1915 to 1927 an additional 90-round bandolier was carried round the neck of the horse in field service marching order. (Collection of Alan Simpson)





Machine gun pack horse, 17th (Duke of Cambridge's Own) Lancers; Cologne, Germany, 1919. The Hotchkiss gun is visible in its canvas and leather cover, as is the leather carrier for spare barrels on top of the pack saddle. Below the gun is a case for 30-round feed strips, while both the horse and its handler have the special bandoliers for nine-round strips. (Imperial War Museum Q7724)

the girth, crupper and breastplate. The valise, with the waterdeck rolled around it, is about to be fitted. After this a sheepskin will be thrown over the whole assembly and secured in place with a surcingle. Note the Hungarian style of stirrups.

B2: Corporal, 10th (Prince of Wales's Own) Light Dragoons (Hussars); Spain, 1813

Based on a contemporary painting, this shows the uniform worn on campaign, with the forage cap. The uniform of the 10th had by this date changed considerably from that shown in Plate A. Note the red facings, the badge of the Prince of Wales above the corporal's chevrons, and the hussar barrel sash. Overalls and ankle boots were preferred wear on campaign in the Peninsula, the former usually with leather reinforcement and chains to fasten under the instep when mounted. The 1796 pattern Light Cavalry sword or sabre is worn on a waist-belt and suspended by slings – as is the newly introduced sabretache. His pouch holds 30 rounds of ammunition, and its belt doubles as a sling for his Paget

carbine. Note the chain and T-bar and the swivel on his pouch-belt, either of which could be fastened to the sling bar of the carbine. The straps of his haversack and canteen are slung over his right shoulder so that they hang on his left side.

At **B3** are detailed views of his weapons and equipment. The Paget carbine was the primary firearm of the light cavalry regiments for many years; with an overall length of just over 31ins, it had a 16-in barrel with a calibre of 0.66 inch. It had a lock to bolt the action in half-cock, and a stirrup link at the muzzle prevented the loss of the ramrod. Beside the carbine are a haversack and an 'Italian' canteen (the latter so-called because they were made in Italy from the poplar wood available there). To the right is a 1796 pattern Light Cavalry sword attached to a waist-belt, as is the sabretache – a pocket for papers, etc. The sword scabbard could be thrust through a loop on the rear face of the sabretache to prevent it from flapping about when mounted. At far right are the carbine pouch, belt and swivel.

C: HEAVY CAVALRY, 1796–1815

C1: Private, 6th (Inniskilling) Dragoons; Belgium, 1815

In 1796 the Heavy Cavalry regiments were ordered to adopt regulation patterns of saddle, sword, carbine and pistol which, by 1815, had replaced the previous items. From 1811 the Prince Regent began to order uniform changes

that affected the cavalry more than any other arm. Most heavy regiments were ordered to wear this helmet. Note how the cloak worn by cavalymen protected not only the wearer but also his saddle, holsters, valise, and much of his mount as well.

C2: Sergeant, 2nd (Royal North British) Dragoons; Belgium, 1815

He is dressed for campaign in jacket and overalls, and his regimental bearskin cap is covered with oilskin. In addition to his pouch and belt, sword-belt and sabretache he carries a haversack and a canteen. Note that the belts of the 'heavies' were much broader than those of the Light Cavalry. Our subject demonstrates one of the 'guard' positions with his 1796 pattern Heavy Cavalry sword, which has been sharpened to a spear point. At 35ins the Heavy Cavalry sword was 2ins longer than the sabre of the Light Cavalry, and at 2lbs 6oz it was 4oz heavier.

At C3 is the Heavy Cavalry Universal Saddle, pattern 1796, stripped to show the girth, surcingle, crupper, 1796 pattern Heavy Dragoon carbine (note sling bar) and carbine boot, holsters with a 1796 pattern Dragoon pistol, rolled cloak, valise and waterdeck, and a messtin in an oilskin cover.

Note the leather flounce and folded forage net tied to the cloak; the various straps to secure equipment to the pommel and cantle; and the shape of the stirrups. The carbine was 41ins long and, like the pistol, had a calibre of 0.75ins.

Also in the foreground is another example of the 1796 pattern Heavy Cavalry sword, here retaining the original 'hatchet' tip. It has the standard sword knot fastened to the hilt, but also a red cloth lining to the shell guard with red cord laces. This type of lining was worn by some units, including the heavy cavalry regiments of the King's German Legion; others preferred white buff leather guard linings, as in C2.

(Most of the items in this plate are based on those shown in the Dighton painting of Sgt. Ewart of the 2nd RNBD capturing the eagle of the French 45th Line Infantry at Waterloo – a picture rich in detail.)

D: LIGHT CAVALRY, 1816-54

D1: Private, 4th (Queen's Own) Light Dragoons; Crimea, 1854

During the Crimean War the British light cavalry regiments were still using a modification of the 1805 pattern saddle; carbines had also been modified from flintlock to percussion. This private carries the 1829 pattern three-bar hilted sword for Light Cavalry; and the bridle of his mount has inverted 'Y'-shaped face-pieces (after photographs). The Crimea was the last war in which the heavy and light regiments used special equipment and weapons. 'Universal' issues began

Lance-corporal 'number 1' of a Hotchkiss machine gun crew, 17th Lancers, 3rd Cavalry Division, France, 1918. He wears the machine gunner's waistcoat, specially padded against burns from the hot barrel of the gun after firing; a bandolier of nine-round feed strips for his gun; a 0.455in. Smith & Wesson revolver, a respirator, haversack and water bottle. Note the regimental cap badge on his helmet, the 'club' insignia on his upper sleeves, the good conduct chevrons, wound stripe, and 'HG' skill-at-arms badge on his left forearm, and the overseas service stripes on his right. He carries a box of 30-round feed strips as well as his covered gun. (Author's drawing)

with the sword of 1853 and continued until, by the 1870s, all cavalry troopers were armed and equipped uniformly.

D2: Private, 9th Light Dragoons (Lancers), 1817
One light cavalry innovation of the early 19th century was the adoption of the lance into British service in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, during which British troops had on several occasions faced lethally effective lancers in French service. This private is practising dismounted lance drill, making a 'right point' – it was conventional for lancers to be





given basic weapons handling training on foot before attempting to perform the movements while managing a horse. After experiments with much longer lances the pattern of 1816 was reduced to 9ft in length, a size that remained constant throughout the service of this weapon. Note the pennon secured to the shaft of the 1816 pattern lance with a metal bar, and the sling attached at the centre of the shaft. This figure is after Dighton; the uniform copies the style of the Polish lancers, especially in the 'lance cap'. The soldier carries the Light Cavalry sword/sabre of 1796 pattern hooked up to a waist-belt from which a sabretache is also suspended.

E: THE FIRST UNIVERSAL EQUIPMENT
E1: Corporal, 9th (Queen's Own) Lancers;
Afghanistan, 1880

The first universal saddle was this wood arch pattern of 1856; sometimes called 'Nolan's saddle', its wooden arches were reinforced with metal. The sideboards and flaps were padded with panels of serge stuffed with horsehair, and the seat was secured to the arches with rivets and screws. Note the lance boots attached to the stirrups, the case for horseshoes and nails, the valise with the circular mess tin strapped to it, the wallets carried over the corporal's shoulder, his slung carbine, haversack and waterbottle, his pouch and belt, and

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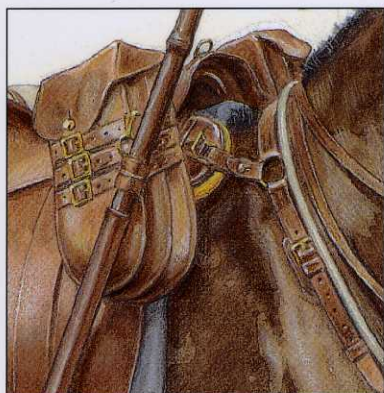
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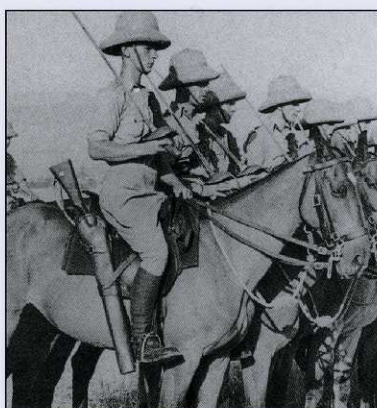
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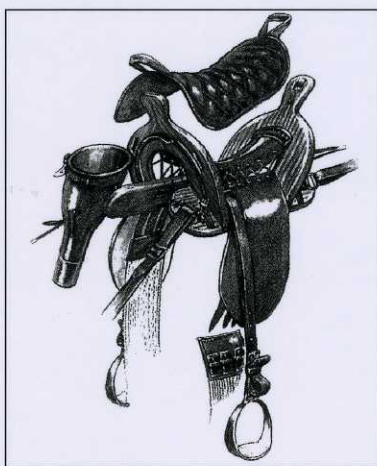
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